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THE STORY
OF
FOUR CENTURIES.

SKETCHES OF EARLY CHURCH HISTORY
FOR YOUTHFUL READERS.

By H. L. L.,
One of the Authors of "Hymns from the Land of Luther,"
Author of "Thoughtful Hours," &c.



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PREFACE

THE object of the present volume is so plainly stated in its first pages, that there appears to be little need of any preface or formal introduction. It does not aspire to the title of a regular Church History of the First Four Centuries, but only offers a few narratives, in connected order, of the most remarkable events and distinguished characters of that period. The style adopted, it is hoped, may suit the taste of intelligent young readers, and by awakening their interest may lead them afterwards to prosecute for themselves this important field of study.

In a work of this simple kind all topics of controversy have been avoided; but every endeavour has been made to ascertain that the facts related are generally admitted. Perhaps what was chiefly in-

tended for young persons may be also found attractive to some older readers, who happen not to have access to fuller histories of those great and "holy men of old," whose eventful lives are here sketched, and who must be subjects of interest to every Christian mind and heart.

EDINBURGH, 1864.



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I.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

HAVE not many young readers, who *think* as they read their Bible, experienced at times a feeling of regret, on coming to the close of the Book of Acts? or a wish that this portion of the Word of God had been longer, and contained more particulars of the history of the apostles, their fellow-labourers, and early converts? Such a feeling, if expressed to a parent or teacher, will probably be met by the reply, "You will find this, and much more, when you are older, in Church History." But Church History, in its usual form of large volumes and long chapters, can hardly be attractive at an early age, unless to the few who are students from childhood. Yet much of the story which these long works contain, and the lessons they teach, cannot be known or learned too soon. May not many of the principal facts be related in such a manner as shall attract and interest our young friends, and lead them on to study with enjoyment more important works on the same subject? It is with this hope that the following sketches have been written.

Let us turn, in the first place, to the Acts of the Apostles—the oldest History of the Church of Christ, and the only one in which we are certain to find “truth without any mixture of error.” Its author, “the beloved physician,” the friend and companion of Paul, was himself a witness of much which he records, and in writing the whole was directed by the Spirit of God. His work may also be called a History of Missions, for in those days the Church of Christ was in the fullest sense a missionary Church.

The events which Luke relates extend over a period of about thirty years. During that brief time, what wonders the gospel accomplished, through the ministry of humble, earnest believers! When our Lord ascended to heaven, we are told that the number of his disciples in Jerusalem was about one hundred and twenty. But when Luke wrote the Acts, Christianity had already been preached, and Churches founded, in the most splendid and powerful cities, such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome itself,—and the gospel was spreading beyond Palestine throughout Asia Minor, Italy, Greece, Arabia, and Spain. The work effected by a few Galilean fishermen was surely the work of God; the doctrine they taught was surely the truth of God, the “good tidings of great joy,” which “all people” may still rejoice to hear.

When we take up a volume of any history, whatever the period be, we shall always find a few great men

standing forward prominently, as the principal characters of their age, the chief instruments in bringing about its leading events and changes. That equality which some people are foolish enough to talk of and desire, was never intended by Providence. Great talents, great gifts of any kind, must always raise a man above his fellows, and give him influence over them for evil or for good. In the Book of Acts we find some believers only casually mentioned, as Gaius, Damaris, Theophilus;—yet even this slight notice in the Word of God secures to them an honourable and lasting remembrance. Of others some circumstance of peculiar interest is related, as in the case of Dorcas and Cornelius. Others, like the martyr Stephen, stand more conspicuously forward. But two men are the leading characters, the spiritual heroes of this history,—the apostles Peter and Paul.

These eminent men differed in various respects. Paul was the superior in birth, education, and other outward advantages. But Peter had the great privilege of having personally seen and known the Saviour on earth. Their spheres of action were different,—Peter being the great apostle of the Jewish Church, Paul specially sent to the Gentiles. Their characters differed also in several points. But both had been “much forgiven,” and both “loved much;”—both were devoted labourers in the Master’s service, bearing the burden and heat of the day, and at the close of life

receiving the martyr's crown. They rise before us, pre-eminent among the "great cloud of witnesses" as noble examples of faith and labour; and we may hear each of them say to ourselves, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also was of Christ."

In this Book of Acts we may find a specimen or miniature copy of Church History ever since. For the grace of God, and human nature, have been the same in all ages. As the Gospels are a record of the work of Christ for our salvation, so the Acts may be called a record of the Holy Spirit's work in the same cause; for His divine power is constantly referred to, both in its ordinary and miraculous operations. We hear of multitudes awakened at one time,—as in Jerusalem at Pentecost, under the preaching of Peter, and in Samaria under Philip. We have the conversion of families related, as those of Cornelius and Crispus; we have solitary instances, as that of the Ethiopian treasurer. We find sudden, extraordinary conversions, as that of Saul, and the Philippian jailer;—and those of a more common kind, in the use of ordinary means, as the Bereans, who "searched the Scriptures daily," so that "many of them believed." The wonders which grace can accomplish meet us in every page. But alas, we see also abundant evidence of the power of Satan, and the corruption of our fallen hearts, in persecutions from without, and misunderstandings, dissensions, heresies, already arising within

the infant Church of Christ. These things are written for our profit, and ought to be lessons of warning for all who read them.

The first twelve chapters relate chiefly to the progress of Christianity among the Jews, in which Peter is the principal agent. After the great outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, when three thousand were converted in one day, we hear of the first arrangements of the primitive Church, in its holy simplicity, charity, and devotedness, when "the Lord added to it daily such as should be saved," and "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." It is sad to think how short a time this blessed state of things lasted, although the earliest "murmurings" (vi. 1), were quickly checked by the judicious measures of the apostles.

Then comes the martyrdom of Stephen, and days of open persecution, which God overruled, as he has so often done since, for the spread of the truth it was intended to suppress. The great persecutor is himself arrested, and changed into the most devoted preacher of the faith he once blasphemed. The conversion of Cornelius and his family is given as the first fruits of God's mercy to the Gentiles, which the Jewish believers, though prejudiced at first, soon thankfully recognise and rejoice in. It then appears that Paul is ordained of the Spirit as the great Gentile missionary; and the remainder of the book is mostly

occupied by the journeyings, labours, successes and sufferings of himself and his companions. We must consult a map, such as is published to illustrate the Acts, in order to have some idea of all that this wonderful man accomplished, in carrying the gospel through Asia Minor, Greece, and to Rome itself. And we must not think of travelling then, as at all resembling our modern journeys. By sea or land it was always slow, difficult, often dangerous, demanding bodily strength and self-denial, along with mental courage and energy. Paul was, to use his own touching words, "in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren ; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor. xi. 26, 27).

One other event we must specially notice, the first general Council of the Church, held at Jerusalem, about the year of our Lord 53. It was called on account of some jealousies and difficulties having arisen between the Jewish and Gentile converts. The chief speakers were Peter and James, Paul and Barnabas ;—and all was settled in a spirit of wisdom and love. We shall find constant mention of such councils or assemblies in after history. They continue under various forms and names to this day among

the Churches of Christ, and are often much blessed as the means of composing differences of opinion, checking the spread of false doctrines, and stimulating to holy zeal and brotherly love.

These few remarks may assist the young reader to understand better this portion of Scripture, and study it with more intelligence. We have indeed cause to bless God for this as for every part of his holy Word. Besides scenes and events of deepest interest, we may find in it all the doctrines which make us wise unto salvation, and much that is suited to awaken the conscience and enlighten the understanding of the thoughtless or ignorant, as well as to confirm the faith and hope of the believing heart. It will be found a useful plan, when practicable, to take a paragraph Bible, and read without thinking of chapters and verses ; and to examine the various sermons or addresses of Peter and Paul, noticing the principal doctrines there unfolded, comparing them with the Epistles and the words of the Lord himself. So, by the blessing of God and the teaching of the Spirit, we shall more and more discover the beautiful harmony and consistency of all the inspired records, and be able to say with the believer of old, "Thy word is a light to my feet, and a lamp to my path."



II.

THE APOSTLES AND THEIR FRIENDS.

HISTORY, of any kind, is in its earliest scenes dim and confused. Its records are vague, imperfect, often not to be depended upon. The student finds himself like a man at the end of a deep subterranean cave or passage, who sees a faint light before him, and knows that as he advances it will become more bright,—but where he then stands all is gloom. Hardly can he discern objects at all, or at least make out their true forms. And he is the more painfully convinced of this, when a lamp, which he had carried in his hand, suddenly goes out. This is our situation now. In tracing the first beginnings of the Church of Christ, we have the light of his own blessed word to guide us,—we see clearly, and are in no danger of mistakes. But the light ceases to shine, and all is mist and darkness. Or, as Milner says at the end of his brief review of New Testament History, “I have hitherto sailed by the compass of Scripture, and now find myself at once entering into an immense

ocean without a guide. In fact, I have undertaken to conduct the reader through a long, obscure, and difficult course, with scarce a beacon here and there set up to direct me."


But the man at the bottom of the cave must not sit down in despair; he must patiently grope his way forward, stumbling as seldom as possible. In the same spirit let us look for what facts we can find, suited to interest or instruct.

Church history, for the sake of distinctness, is generally divided into *Centuries*, dating, of course, from the birth of our Lord. Luke closes his narrative in Acts about the year 63. Thus we have left 37 years of the first century to account for, and their general tale is soon told.

About the year 64, just after Luke leaves us in the dark, we read in Roman history of a dreadful fire in the city of Rome. The reigning emperor was Nero, one of the most cruel and bloody tyrants who ever occupied that blood-stained throne. There was a general impression among his oppressed subjects that *he* was in some way the author of this calamity. To screen himself, he endeavoured to throw the blame upon the Christians, who by this time were pretty numerous in Rome. Paul speaks of saints even "in Cæsar's household." However quietly and peaceably believers then sought to live, they could not avoid being marked men, and the hatred of Satan and his

agents was already awakened by their silent protest against sin and idolatry. The historian Tacitus calls their religion "a detestable superstition," and while he records their sufferings, thinks them justly merited by a people whom he considers "the enemies of mankind." A strange title this, for the followers of that religion whose laws may be summed up in the single word *love*—love to God as supreme, and love to all men as brethren. We can hardly have a stronger proof of the natural blindness and enmity of the unconverted heart against the truth.

Now began the first great Pagan persecution, which raged for three or four years. We shudder to read of the sufferings inflicted upon the followers of Christ. They were crucified, torn in pieces by wild dogs, burned alive. It is said that Nero caused some of them to be covered with combustible materials, and burned in this state as torches. to illuminate at night the public gardens! At this time Paul suffered martyrdom. And as there were no Christian historians in those days, we have only the accounts of their sufferings from their enemies, and hear nothing of how they were supported under them. But the simple fact of so many being found "faithful unto death," proves that the divine promises were fulfilled, and no ordinary degree of faith and courage bestowed from heaven upon the persecuted Church.



The tyrant Nero died in 68, and soon after arose the great Roman war against Judea, which was concluded by the destruction of Jerusalem. The horrors of that dreadful siege, as recorded at length by the Jewish historian Josephus, are such as we can hardly bear to read or think of. Truly wrath fell upon the nation "to the uttermost," and the most terrible denunciations of ancient prophecy, and of our Lord himself (Deut. xxviii. 49-67; Matt. xxiv.; Luke xix. 43, 44), were literally fulfilled. But the Christians in Jerusalem, remembering the directions of their Master (Matt. xxiv. 15-20), withdrew from the doomed city to a village beyond Jordan, called Petra, and thus escaped the destruction which overwhelmed their countrymen.

The second Pagan persecution took place under the Emperor Domitian. He reigned from 81 to 96. He was an atrocious tyrant, and towards the close of his reign the Christians became his victims. They were commonly accused of *atheism*, from their refusing to worship the gods of Rome. Two persons of distinction are specially mentioned as sufferers at this time, both relations of Domitian; the Consul Flavius Clemens, and his wife Flavia Domitilla. A Roman historian accuses Flavius of *slothfulness*. There may have been some natural indolence of character, but more probably, when awakened to heavenly things, he could no longer take his former interest in the

affairs of secular ambition, or share as before in the vanities and vices of the Imperial Court. He was put to death ; his wife was banished to the island of Pondataria (now Santa Maria), on the coast of Lucania.

Nerva, who succeeded Domitian, was a man of different dispositions. He published a general pardon to those "accused of impiety," and permitted the banished ones to return home. One person alone was not allowed to profit by this act of clemency. Domitilla, probably on account of her relationship to the late tyrant, remained in exile. There seems something of touching interest in the fate of this woman—a widow—an exile—a solitary sufferer for Christ's sake, far from home and kindred, and from all the luxuries and comforts of her prosperous days. Yet, doubtless, the Lord was with her, and the support and consolations which others have received under similar trials, would not be withheld from this lonely mourner.

Thus the close of this century leaves the Church in a state of comparative rest and tranquillity. Let us now look back, and see what special information we can gather, in regard to some of those characters whom we have become acquainted with in New Testament history.

The first of the twelve apostles who followed their Lord to heaven, was James the son of Zebedee, who

was put to death by Herod Agrippa, as related in Acts xii. 2. We are told on good authority, that the man who betrayed him, was so impressed by his fortitude and resignation, that he was overwhelmed with remorse, and himself became a believer in Christ. He confessed his faith, and was beheaded along with the apostle, whose forgiveness he asked and received on the way to execution.

The next apostle who suffered martyrdom was James, "the brother of the Lord." He was considered the chief pastor or bishop of the Church in Jerusalem, and always resided there. He was greatly esteemed, and surnamed "the just," from his great amiability and uprightness of character. But had he been without enemies, he could not, at that period, have been a faithful servant of Christ. He was stoned to death by his unbelieving countrymen about the year 62, and is said to have died, like the first martyr Stephen, praying for his murderers. Josephus, no friend to Christianity, observes, "These things," meaning the miseries inflicted on the Jews by the Romans, "happened to them by way of avenging the death of James the Just, brother of Jesus whom they call Christ. For the Jews slew him, though a very just man." This is a remarkable testimony. Simeon, son of the Cleopas mentioned in Luke xxiv. 18, was elected pastor of the Jewish Church in the room of James.

The two great apostles, Peter and Paul, were victims, as we have already seen, of the persecution under Nero. Peter's labours were great and extended, chiefly among his own countrymen, scattered throughout the districts of Asia Minor, to whom his Epistles are addressed. He seems also to have visited Babylon, and founded a Church there, for the idea that in 1 Pet. v. 13, *Rome* is spoken of under the prophetic name of Babylon, appears very improbable. Although we cannot suppose that his labours were exclusively among the Jews, at all events his chief success was with them, as Paul observes (Gal ii. 7, 8). There are abundance of Romish legends in regard to his latter years, but very little that can really be depended upon. One thing is remarkable—the Church which forbids her clergy to marry, appropriates this apostle as her great head and representative, and yet it is undeniable, that he lived long in the married state. He is generally believed to have suffered martyrdom about the same time as Paul, and is said to have been crucified with his head downwards, by his own request, as considering himself unworthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

Paul was long a prisoner in Rome, and there wrote many of his Epistles. During the two years' captivity mentioned by Luke (Acts xxviii. 30, 31), he was allowed freely to preach the gospel to all who visited him, and thus greatly enlarged and strengthened the

Church. He could also, by means of letters and messengers, maintain in some degree his "care of all the Churches" elsewhere. His affectionate heart was much cheered in such trying circumstances, by the love and sympathy of friends. In this way he alludes to Timothy (Phil. ii. 19-22); Epaphroditus (Phil. ii. 25-27); Onesimus (Philem. 10-13); Onisephorus (2 Tim. i. 16-18), and others (Col. iv. 10-12). The trial of imprisonment alone, to a spirit like his, must have been severe, and the pious contentment and resignation to which he attained (Phil. iv. 11-13), can only have been "learned" with difficulty.

It seems pretty clearly established, on the evidence of old Christian historians, that at the end of two years Paul was liberated, and pursued his missionary journeys for some time again. At this period he is supposed to have fulfilled his purpose of visiting Spain, mentioned in Rom. xv. 27, 28. After returning to Ephesus and Macedonia, he wrote the Epistle to Titus, and 2 Timothy. In Titus vi. 12, he speaks of an intention of wintering at Nicopolis. There, it is thought, he was again arrested, and sent back a prisoner to Rome, a melancholy journey, during which he had few friends to cheer him. Luke alone was his faithful companion (2 Tim. iv. 11). His imprisonment was now much more severe than formerly. He was confined in chains, as "an evil doer," or malefactor (2 Tim. ii. 9), and his friends

could only visit him with danger and difficulty. Four of these faithful ones are mentioned by name (2 Tim. iv. 21). Linus was afterwards a bishop of the Church in Rome. Pudens was a Roman of rank; and Claudia, his bride, is believed to have been a *British princess*. If the tradition in regard to her be correct, there is something very pleasing in the idea of the great apostle being cheered under his last trials by a daughter of our own land.

As his final examination approached, he looked forward to death as his certain sentence. How noble, how sublime, in such a situation, is his language of assured faith and hope, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. iv. 6-8). Who can read these words, and not feel that he who wrote them, under all his afflictions, was an object of envy rather than commiseration?

He earnestly desired to have the consolation of seeing his "beloved son" Timothy before his departure; but whether or not this wish was granted, we have no certain information. He was beheaded outside the city walls, on the road to Ostia, where

a monument was raised to his memory by the Emperor Constantine, and remains to this day. His martyrdom is believed to have occurred very shortly before the death of Nero.

John, the beloved apostle, survived all his brethren, and lived to a great age. During the persecution of Domitian, it is said that he was thrown into a caldron of boiling oil, and came out unhurt. Some disbelieve this story, but it is related on good authority, and we have reason to think that miracles had not quite ceased at that time. The emperor, supposing his life preserved by magical arts, sent him to labour in the mines on the island of Patmos. Here he was favoured with those sublime prophetic visions, which he has recorded for the benefit of the Church in all ages in the Book of Revelation. After the death of Domitian he returned to Asia, and exercised superintendence over the Churches there, especially that of Ephesus.

An interesting anecdote is told of him at this period. While making one of his tours, he was greatly attracted by a young man, whom he recommended to the special care of one of the pastors. The youth was baptized, and for some time maintained a Christian profession, but fell under the power of temptation, and, going from sin to sin, ended in becoming the leader of a band of robbers. The aged apostle, inquiring after him, was deeply

grieved by hearing of his misconduct. He ascertained the haunts of the robber band, went there alone, and allowed himself to be taken prisoner. He asked to be led to their captain; and we may imagine with what feelings the young man would behold once more the venerable father, who had so earnestly sought his salvation in former days. Overcome by shame, he attempted to fly. John followed him. "My son, why are you flying from an unarmed and aged man? Believe me, Christ has sent me in search of you, with messages of hope and mercy." The robber stood still, trembled and wept. John prayed with him, exhorted him, brought him back to his Christian friends, and did not leave him till he believed that the backslider was really restored by grace. The tale is a touching example of zeal and love, worthy of the disciple who had leaned on the bosom of the Friend of sinners.

John lived to the age of one hundred, and died a natural death. When his failing powers rendered him unable to speak much in public, he would repeat the exhortation, "Children, love one another," saying that every earthly duty was comprehended in the "new commandment" of the Lord. Yet the apostle of love was also a "son of thunder," when it became necessary to denounce the heresies already arising in the infant Church;—and this is quite consistent with his written admonitions (2 John 10, 11).

There is another individual of whom we would fain know more, who is ever associated in our minds with the beloved disciple,—I mean the blessed Mother of our Lord. But neither in Scripture nor authentic history can we find any trace of her, from the hour when John led her away from the sad scene on Calvary “to his own home,” except the passing notice (Acts i. 14), of her being exactly where we should have looked for her,—among the little band of believers who were united in prayer and supplication, awaiting the promised descent of the Holy Ghost. We cannot doubt that the remainder of her life was most holy and honoured, and her death most blessed; but there is not the slightest foundation for supposing that there was anything miraculous in either, or that *she* entered heaven in any other way, or by any other title, than that of every believing sinner. Surely the silence of Scripture and of history in regard to her was not ordained without a purpose, and should be viewed as a providential protest against the lying, blasphemous legends circulated in after ages, and continued, with marvellous effrontery, in our own day. If holy saints above know of what passes here below, one would imagine that the blessed Mary, even in heaven, must have grieved over the sin and the idolatry of which she has been made the object.

Concerning the lives and labours of the other

apostles and first evangelists we have no certain records. Writing and book-making was a very different matter in those days from what it is in our own. The Christians were at first a poor, despised, persecuted people, whom the philosophers and great authors of the ages thought almost beneath their notice. But, to quote the words of an accomplished modern writer, the apostles and their friends "were not idle, and all history testifies that the remotest climes were traversed and made to resound with the tidings of joy. The accounts, indeed, which have come down to us on the wings of tradition and passing allusion are vague and imperfect, like the rumours of a battle stricken far away amid strange scenes and peoples; still there is enough to assure us of the fact of a great struggle going on everywhere between the powers of light and darkness. Thus, Thomas is said to have preached the gospel in Parthia; Andrew in Scythia; Bartholomew in India; and John Mark in Alexandria. But these are only a few of the great company of preachers, whose names and scenes of labour are long forgotten, and shall remain unknown until the revelations of the great day."

They were true heroes, true philanthropists, the greatest benefactors of their race. They sought "the true honour, which cometh from God." Let us by His help seek to follow their example, according to our sphere and opportunities, serving our own genera-

tion according to the will of God, content to do without the approval or applause of the world, and willing to encounter its reproach and hatred, if needful, for the Saviour's sake. So, when life on earth closes, we through His grace shall join the blessed company above of those "good and faithful servants," who rest from their labours in the joy of their Lord.







I.

FALSE DOCTRINES AND FAITHFUL WITNESSES.

WE have now reached the close of the first century, when the early Church, having passed through times of severe persecution, was left in a state of comparative ease and tranquillity. Yet this peace was chiefly external, for sad evils were already appearing within her own borders.


We often hear of *heresy*, and *heretics*. Heresy, spoken of in regard to religion, means dangerous error, and a heretic is one who has departed from "the truth as it is in Jesus," and holds false doctrines and opinions, dangerous to his own soul, and to the souls of others who may embrace them. But the words have frequently been misapplied, and true believers have been accused of heresy by those who were in reality the heretics themselves, as is the case still in Roman Catholic countries. Our Lord spoke of the false Christs, and false prophets, who were soon to arise and "deceive many," and we find St. Paul and the other apostles often alluding to the errors which

were even in their day beginning to appear, and warning believers against them.

The first heretics are generally classed under two great sects,—the Gnostics, or Docetae; and the Ebionites.

The Gnostics were a set of men who tried to engraft Christianity upon the doctrines of Eastern philosophy. They held strange wild errors in regard to the creation of all things, and the origin of evil. They considered sin as inseparably connected with the material frame, and denied that Jesus Christ (whom they regarded as a Divine Being, but not equal with the Father), ever took a real human body at all. Some of this sect practised the most severe self-denial, and all sorts of austerities, by way of rising superior to the flesh;—others gave themselves up to all manner of sinful indulgence. St. Paul exhorts Timothy against the endless questions and speculations of these philosophic heretics (1 Tim. i. 3, 4; vi. 20, 21).

Simon, the Samaritan magician, is supposed by many to have been the first person who openly endeavoured to combine such strange errors with Christian doctrines. They are also thought to be the Nicolaitan heresies, so solemnly denounced in the Epistles to the Churches of Ephesus and Smyrna (Rev. ii. 6, 15). Another leader of this sect was named Cerinthus. Against him the Apostle John is



said to have protested in the most solemn manner. A story is told of his going one day to the bath at Ephesus, and finding that Cerinthus was also there, he hastily retired. "Let us fly," he exclaimed, "lest the bath should fall while an enemy of the truth is within it." We must admire the goodness of God in sparing the venerable apostle to a great age, as a living witness for truth and against error. His Gospel was written at a late period, with a view to counteract the heresies already rising concerning the person of the Lord.

The Ebionites denied the divinity of Christ altogether, considering him as only the son of Joseph and Mary, a model of every virtue and excellence. Of course they also rejected the doctrine of the atonement, for the sufferings and death of one *man* could never atone for the sins of others. But indeed this great doctrine, the foundation of all our hopes for eternity, was denied equally in fact, if not so openly, by the Gnostic heretics. The latter were chiefly found among Gentile converts, the former among the Jews.

These two great errors, in regard to the person and the work of our Redeemer, have, under different forms and names, existed in every age of the Church. They are too common in our own day, and may be met with in books, in sermons, in society. It is of the utmost moment to obtain clear and sound

views, in early life, on these all-important points, so as to "continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not easily moved away from the hope of the gospel." Some minds (and they are perhaps the happiest), are rarely troubled by doubts or difficulties of any kind. But others, when roused to serious consideration, *will* question, speculate, doubt ;—and these the enemy of souls will strongly tempt to error and scepticism. Let not the youthful inquirer be discouraged, if such for a time be his own experience. Let him pray earnestly for a humble, teachable spirit, and in this frame of mind seek the promised light and help of the Holy Spirit, to "lead him unto all truth." Let him also state his difficulties, without hesitation, to a parent, teacher, or Christian friend of mature years and experience, who may be able to direct him to the best means for getting his "hard questions" answered, and his doubts resolved. No humble, prayerful searcher after divine truth was ever disappointed in the end, and the faith which has had trials to contend with at first is often strongest at last. The promises have never failed,—“Call upon me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knewest not.” “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”

We shall have only too frequent occasion, as we

proceed in our history, to recur to this subject. Let us now look for something of greater interest in the way of fact and narrative.

The Roman emperor, at the beginning of the second century, was Trajan, whose general character, compared with that of many who preceded and followed him, is good and benevolent. Yet the Christians suffered severely under his reign. Nerva, his predecessor, had granted full toleration, and this was now taken away. An interesting letter has been preserved from Pliny, the well-known classical author, then governor of Bithynia, to the emperor, which may be found in Milner and other historians, but is too long for quotation here. He applies for instructions as to the course to be pursued towards the Christians, and to what extent the severity of the laws must be carried out against them. He represents their number as very great, so that the temples of the gods had become almost deserted. He calls their religion "a depraved and excessive superstition," while at the same time bearing witness to the simplicity of their worship and the purity of their lives. Trajan, in reply, directs that "these men are not to be sought after, and when informed against, and brought before the judge, they may be pardoned, if willing to renounce their faith, and offer sacrifice to the gods. But if obstinate, they must be capitally punished."

Many, under these regulations, were found faithful

unto death, in all parts of the empire. Two deserve our special notice.

The first is a most venerable saint, Simon, son of the Cleopas mentioned by Luke. He was bishop, or pastor, of the Jewish Church, successor to James. He was at this time one hundred and twenty years old. No compassion was shown for his great age, unblemished character, or constancy. After being scourged for several successive days, he was in the end crucified.

The other martyr was Ignatius, who is often spoken of in books which relate to the sufferings of the early Church. He was Bishop of Antioch, to which office he had been appointed about the year 70, by such of the apostles as were then alive. His character and ministry are thus described in a very old manuscript, "He was a man in all things like to the apostles. As a good governor (pilot), by the helm of prayer and fasting, he opposed himself to the floods of the adversary ; he was like a divine lamp illuminating the hearts of the faithful by his expositions of the Holy Scriptures ; and lastly, to preserve his Church, he scrupled not freely to expose himself to a bitter death."

In the year 107, the Emperor Trajan visited Antioch, and Ignatius, fearing for his people, and hoping to save them by the sacrifice of himself, voluntarily appeared before the throne. After hav-

ing, in answer to Trajan's questions, boldly confessed his faith, he was sentenced to be carried to Rome, and there to be "thrown to the wild beasts for the entertainment of the people." It appears strange that he should not rather have been executed at Antioch, but God overruled all for good, that the testimony borne to Christ by His faithful servant might be more illustrious and more extensively useful. The delay occasioned by his journey also allowed him time to write farewell epistles to different Churches. Seven have been preserved, which are considered authentic by old historians, though lately this point, at least in regard to some passages, has been disputed among scholars. They are full of interest and instruction.

Four of these were written from Smyrna, where the vessel was detained for a time, and where he had the great consolation of intercourse with Polycarp, bishop of the Church there, an old friend and brother in the faith. They had been fellow disciples of St. John, and we may imagine what their feelings must have been in their meeting for the last time on earth.

One of the letters said to be written by Ignatius from Smyrna is addressed to the Christians in Rome, exhorting them not to use any means for his deliverance. Here are some extracts,—“ I fear your charity lest it should injure me. If you be silent in my behalf I shall be made partaker of God, but if you love to detain me in the flesh, I shall again have my course to run. . . .

Rather encourage the wild beasts that they may become my sepulchre, that nothing of my body may be left, that I may give no trouble to any one when I fall asleep. . . . Pardon me, I know what is good for me. Now I begin to be a disciple, nor shall anything move me of things visible or invisible. Let fire and the cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil come upon me; be it so, only may I enjoy Jesus Christ! Him I seek who died for us. Him I desire who rose again for us. My worldly affections are crucified, the fire of God's love burns within me, and cannot be extinguished. It lives, it speaks, and says, Come to the Father."

This is a noble spirit, yet the best of saints are imperfect on earth, and Ignatius seems to have carried his desire for martyrdom to an excessive degree. There is an apparent want in the letter of perfect resignation to the will of the Lord, or sufficient value for *life* devoted to his service. On this point Milner remarks,—“That eagerness for martyrdom which Ignatius expresses I see neither in Paul nor in any of the apostles. They rather refer themselves calmly to the will of God in all things which concern themselves. On the whole, there appears in Ignatius the same zeal for God and love to Jesus Christ, and the same holy contempt of earthly things, which was so


eminent in the apostles, but I suspect not an equal degree of calm resignation to the divine will."

The martyr's short reprieve was soon over, and bidding a last earthly farewell to his mourning friends, he was hurried onwards in order to reach Rome in time for the public spectacles. At Troas another brief delay occurred, and he found opportunity for writing to Philadelphia, to Smyrna, and to his beloved Polycarp. Some expressions in this last epistle are very instructive,—“Bear with all, as the Lord doth bear with thee. Find time for prayer without ceasing. Ask for more understanding than thou hast at present. Watch, and possess a spirit ever attentive. Speak to each separately, as Almighty God shall enable thee to do. Bear with the burdens of all as a perfect combatant. The more labour the more reward. Watch as a divine wrestler. Stand firm as an anvil continually struck.”

The journey was continued by land and sea, and while the attendants of Ignatius, who relate the circumstances of his martyrdom, speak of their own sorrow in the thought of being separated from him, they add that *he* rejoiced in the prospect of so soon leaving the world, and departing to his Lord. At Rome the Christians met him, and wished to be allowed to use means for preserving his life, but he inflexibly refused. At the place of execution he was attended by a number of the brethren, and allowed

to join with them in prayer. He was then thrown among the wild beasts in the amphitheatre, while the Roman crowd looked on as if at an entertaining spectacle. The sufferings of the noble martyr were quickly over, his spirit ascended to be with Christ, and of his mortal body only a few bones were left, which the sorrowing believers ventured to collect and carefully preserved, and which were afterwards buried at Antioch.

The Amphitheatre of Rome was a large oval space of ground, strongly inclosed, without a roof, and rows of seats sloping upwards all around, capable of containing thousands of spectators. Its remains are still visible among the ruins of the ancient city, and the Christian visitor will often think of Ignatius and others of "the noble army of martyrs" who there submitted to tortures and death rather than deny their Lord. Let us thank God that our lot has not been cast in times like theirs. We may well be content without the martyr's crown, but we should pray daily for more of their spirit and their faith. For still, in every age, "they that will live godly in Christ Jesus" must be ready, in one shape or other, to "suffer persecution," and his words remain true, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever will deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."





II.

JUSTIN MARTYR AND POLYCARP,

THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER AND THE CHRISTIAN PASTOR.



I do not attempt in this little volume to give a regular history of the periods under review, but only propose to lay before our young readers such leading facts and circumstances as may awaken interest and afford instruction. The details can be studied in later life from the works of our standard historians.

The martyrdom of the holy Ignatius occurred in 107, during the persecution under Trajan. That emperor died in 117. His successor, Adrian, was never an open persecutor, and when his attention was drawn to the sufferings which the Christians were still enduring, he gave orders that they should only be punished when found guilty of breaking the laws, and not merely on account of their religion. But still in many ways, by false accusations and charging the crimes of heretics upon the Church at large, the enemies of truth found means to gratify their malignity.

Adrian was succeeded in 137 by Antoninus Pius, a character who deserves our special consideration. There are few finer specimens in history of heathen virtue, of what the natural man may attain to, apart from the grace of God. "Despotic power in his hands seems to have been only an instrument of doing good to mankind. His temper was mild and gentle in a very high degree, yet the vigour of his government was as striking as if he had been of the most keen and irritable disposition. He attended to all persons and things with as minute an exactness as if his own private property had been concerned. Scarcely any fault is ascribed to him but that of a temper excessively inquisitive."* Far from persecuting the Christians, when their case was fully brought before him by Justin Martyr (of whom we shall soon hear more), he gave decided orders in their favour. A remarkable edict has been preserved, addressed to the Common Council of Asia, in which he says :—

"I am quite of opinion that the gods will take care to discover such persons. For it much more concerns them to punish those who refuse to worship them than you if they be able. But you harass and vex the Christians, and accuse them of atheism and other crimes, which you can by no means prove. . . . As to the earthquakes which happened in past times or

* Milner.

lately, is it not proper to remind you of your own despondency when they happen, and to desire you to compare your spirit with theirs, and observe how serenely they confide in God? In such seasons you seem to be ignorant of the gods, and to neglect their worship; you live in the practical ignorance of the supreme God himself, and you harass and persecute to death those who do worship him. Concerning these same men, some others of the provincial governors wrote to our divine father Adrian, to whom he returned answer that they should not be molested unless they appeared to attempt something against the Roman government. Many also have signified to me concerning these men, to whom I have returned an answer agreeable to the maxims of my father. But if any person will persist in accusing the Christians as such, let the accused be acquitted, though he appears to be a Christian, and let the accuser be punished."

Antoninus reigned twenty-three years, and during the greater part of this time the Church enjoyed a season of repose. His testimony in favour of the Christians of his day is, as Milner remarks, "a singularly valuable one." We must honour the memory of such a man; yet all the more regret that, while perceiving the excellence and beauty of truth, he does not appear to have taken any *personal* interest in it. His character seems one of a type still too often met

with,—pleasing, amiable, benevolent, tolerant of others, but in regard to all personal religion, sceptical and indifferent. We cannot class him among those who never heard of the gospel, and we turn from his memory with a sigh of disappointment and sorrow.

I have already named a distinguished man who flourished during this reign, and whose history is one of much interest, Justin Martyr, who may be considered as the first great *Christian philosopher*. It has pleased God to make the same variety among men in respect of mental as of bodily gifts; and in every age there have been some great thinkers, with minds raised far above the ordinary standard, who, whether spending life in contemplative retirement, or called forth by providence into public action, exercise a wide and lasting influence over the minds of others even for generations beyond their own. It is an unspeakable blessing when such a gifted spirit is found on the side of gospel truth. Alas! too often this is not the case; “not many wise men after the flesh” are humble believers, using their talents to the glory of God; yet some such supports *are* ever and anon granted to the Church of Christ, as we in our own time must gratefully acknowledge. Justin in his day was one of these. He was born in the town of Neapolis (ancient Shechem), in Samaria, but of Gentile, probably Greek parents. He received what was then considered a liberal education, and from his

early years sought happiness chiefly in mental pursuits. In the celebrated philosophical schools of Alexandria he studied by turns under the various sects into which "philosophy falsely so called" was then divided. But in none of these could his spirit find the satisfaction it sought. At last, after the Stoics, Peripatetics, and Pythagoreans, had been all tried and abandoned, the doctrines of Plato appeared to him, as they certainly were, the most satisfactory, and he set himself to follow out these in retirement. Then came the time when light from heaven was granted to this earnestly inquiring soul. I must give you the account in his own words:—

"As I was walking one day near the sea I was met by an aged person of a venerable appearance, whom I beheld with much attention. We soon entered into conversation, and upon my professing a love for private meditation, the venerable old man hinted at the absurdity of mere speculation abstracted from practice. This gave occasion to me to express my ardent desire of knowing God, and to expatiate on the praises of philosophy. The stranger, by degrees, endeavoured to cure me of my ignorant admiration of Plato and Pythagoras. He pointed out the writings of the Hebrew prophets as much more ancient than any of those called philosophers, and he led me to some view of the nature and the evidences of Christianity. He added, 'Above all things pray that

the gates of light may be opened to you, for they are not discernible, nor to be understood by any one except God and his Christ enable a man to understand.' He said many other things to the same effect. He then directed me to follow his advice, and he left me. I saw him no more; but immediately a fire was kindled in my soul, and I had a strong affection for the prophets and for those men who were the friends of Christ; I weighed within myself the arguments of the aged stranger, and in the end I found the divine Scriptures to be the only sure philosophy."

Conversion was the same thing then as now; the saying has held true in all ages of the Church, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." But the grace of God does not destroy distinctions of natural taste and disposition. Justin, when he became a Christian, did not cease to be a philosopher. He did not give up his favourite habits of study and retirement, nor even the peculiar dress, which, according to the custom of these times, such men commonly wore, as still in our own colleges. He devoted his great talents to writing in defence of the gospel, both against enemies without and heresy within. The Christian philosopher may serve Christ as effectually in his own department, as the preacher or missionary in theirs. On this principle Justin acted. His conversion took place in the reign of Adrian. To An-

toninus Pius he addressed an apology for Christianity, as such representations were then called, which, as we have seen, produced a most favourable impression on the mind of that just and liberal prince.

But Justin's second apology, presented to the succeeding emperor, was of no avail. Marcus was a most implacable enemy of Christianity. He called himself a philosopher, yet Justin's claims to the same character proved no protection from his malignity. The enemies of the great Christian advocate now took courage and openly accused him. We have an interesting account in Milner of his examination before the Prefect Rusticus, and noble defence of his religion. But against determined enmity and wilful blindness, all was useless, and this great man, together with several other Christians who were brought up at the same time, sealed his testimony with his blood. He was first scourged, and then beheaded.

His character is thus given by Milner:—"He is the first Christian since the apostles' days, who added to an unquestionable zeal and love for the gospel, the character of a man of learning and philosophy. His early habits were retained, and yet were consecrated to the service of God. . . . He examined the various philosophic sects, not merely for the purpose of amusement or ostentation, but to find out God; and in God true happiness. He tried and

found them all wanting. He sought him in the gospel. He found him there; he confessed him; he gave up everything for him; he was satisfied with his choice, and died in serenity. . . . The charity of his heart appears indeed to have been great. He prayed for all men; he declined no dangers for the good of souls, and he involved himself in disputes with philosophers for their benefit, to the extreme hazard of himself. . . . But he found it easier to provoke opposition, and throw away his own life, than to persuade a single philosopher to become a Christian."

In doctrinal views, he held firmly by those great truths in regard to the person of our Lord, which heresy was already undermining. He powerfully defended these, by speaking and writing, alike before heretics and unbelievers. On the important points of justification by faith and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, he was also quite sound. But on some other more speculative subjects, it has been thought that his early education, and natural turn of mind, inclined him to errors which his great influence rendered dangerous for the Church. Milner considers him "the first sincere Christian who was reduced by human philosophy to adulterate the gospel, though in a small degree," and that "we may here mark the decay of the first *spiritual effusion* among the Gentiles, through false wisdom; as long before, namely, from the first Council of Jerusalem, we

noticed a similar decay in the Jewish Church, through self-righteousness."


Justin died in the year 163, early in the reign of Marcus Antoninus. He was taken from evil to come, and spared the pain of witnessing what his brethren had to endure during the sore persecution which followed. Its most illustrious victim was Polycarp, the aged Bishop of Smyrna, the disciple of St. John, and friend of Ignatius. In him we have the last link of connection with those who had the high privilege of seeing and knowing the Saviour on earth. "He had been familiarly conversant with the apostles, and received the government of the Church from those who had been eye-witnesses and ministers of our Lord; and he continually taught that which he had been taught by them. . . . Irenæus informs us that he had a particular delight in recounting what had been told by those who had seen Christ in the flesh."* He is supposed by some writers to have been the angel of the Church in Smyrna, addressed by our Lord (Rev. ii. 8-11). If so, he truly obeyed the exhortation, and "fearing none of those things which he should suffer," was found "faithful unto death."

His age at the period we now speak of was undoubtedly very great, and his long life had been a most eventful one. He had lived to rejoice in the far spread triumphs of Christianity; but also to mourn

* Milner.

over the cruel sufferings of a faithful Church under many persecutions, and, what was yet more afflictive, over the rise and spread of dangerous error within her borders. His opposition to heresy was open and uncompromising. We have few particulars on record regarding the life of this eminent servant of Christ. The circumstances of his death, however, are minutely related, in an epistle from "the Church of God, which sojourns at Smyrna to that which sojourns at Philomelium, and in all places where the Holy Catholic Church sojourns throughout the world." This epistle Milner considers "one of the most precious documents of antiquity."

After speaking of the terrible sufferings and heroic fortitude of other martyrs in Smyrna, the epistle proceeds to more details concerning their aged pastor. Polycarp, unlike Ignatius, did not voluntarily offer himself to death, "but waited till he was apprehended, as our Lord himself did." When the persecution was raging in Smyrna, he at first resolved to remain in the city, then was persuaded by the entreaties of his friends to remove to a village at a short distance. Here he spent most of his time in prayer. One day while thus engaged, he thought he saw in a vision his pillow consumed by fire, and informed his friends that he considered this an intimation that he was to be burned alive. The place of his retreat was discovered by torturing one of his servants. When the



soldiers appeared to arrest him, he received them with perfect composure, desired refreshments to be set before them, and only requested for himself an hour for uninterrupted prayer.

A long account is given of his examination before the Proconsul, and of his holy boldness, which seemed even to embarrass his judge; but the multitude of Jews and Gentiles clamoured for his execution, as in the case of his Great Master, and soon prevailed. The time for shows of wild beasts being over, they demanded that he should be given to the flames. They would admit of no delay, and hastily collected fuel from the shops and baths in the neighbourhood, while the aged martyr "blessed God that he had been counted worthy of this day and hour," and requested that he might not be fastened to the stake, assuring them that he would receive strength to remain firm. The fire being lighted, the flames, we are told, refused to touch him, and "forming the appearance of an arch, as the sail of a vessel filled with wind, were as a wall round the body of the martyr, which was in the midst, not as burning flesh, but as gold and silver refined in a furnace. We received also in our nostrils such a fragrance, as arises from frankincense, or some other precious perfume. At length the impious, observing that he could not be consumed by the fire, ordered an executioner to approach, and plunge his sword into his body." The remains were then thrown

into the fire, and afterwards the epistle goes on to say, "we gathered up his bones—more precious than gold or jewels—and deposited them in a proper place, where, if it be possible, we shall meet, and the Lord shall grant us, in gladness and joy, to celebrate the birth-day of his martyrdom, both in commemoration of those who have wrestled before us, and for the instruction and confirmation of those who come after."

There is something very interesting in the last paragraph of this old document, showing how such papers were preserved in these ancient times :—

"These things Caius hath transcribed from the copy of Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, who also lived with Irenæus. And I, Socrates of Corinth, have transcribed from the copy of Caius. Grace be with you all. And I, Pionius, have transcribed from the copy mentioned, having made search for it, and received the knowledge of it by a vision of Polycarp, as I shall show in what follows, collecting it when now almost obsolete. So may the Lord Jesus Christ collect me with his elect, to whom be glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit, to the ages of ages. Amen."

As to the vision or dream here referred to, we know there have been repeated instances of a similar kind in modern times, without having to suppose anything supernatural in the matter. Or, as Milner says, "Whether the case was worthy of a divine inter-

position, we who indolently enjoy books without end, can scarce be judges."

It is difficult at times to repress the inclination to envy those holy men and women, who knew and loved our Lord Jesus Christ on earth, or even the next generation who, like Polycarp, could hear from them all they had to say of him. The thought will arise—how easy it must have been for them to believe in him, to love him, to follow him in the way to heaven ! But we must recollect that himself has said, "Blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have believed." Let us strive for a share in *this* blessing. If the first Christians had some peculiar evidences of the truth which we have not, others have been granted to us, from the history of the Church and the world since then, which in the nature of things they could not possess. We have no excuse for unbelief, and if faith among us is often weak and imperfect, the fault is our own. For this evil, felt and deplored, there is one unfailing remedy—the prayer which the Lord heard and answered while on earth, and will now hear and answer in heaven,—

"Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief !"

"Lord, increase our faith !"



III.

THE MARTYRS OF LYONS AND VIENNE.

IT seems strange as well as sad, to find the history of our Church, in its early stages, so constantly one of suffering and persecution. We read, indeed, of the truth spreading over all the civilized world, and even penetrating to distant barbarous regions. But everywhere hatred and hostility spring up along with it; wherever the good seed takes root, it must be watered by the martyr's blood. And we are ready to ask, why is it so? in what way must the servants of the meek and holy Saviour provoke this constant hostility? The great cause must be sought in the natural hatred and opposition of fallen man to God and holiness, which, we cannot doubt, the great enemy of mankind takes every means of increasing. He stirred up the fears of the ignorant multitude, the contempt of philosophers, the jealousy of politicians and rulers. And so all manner of false accusations were circulated and believed against the afflicted people of Christ; or


when their blameless lives afforded no possible subject of reproach, the very name of Christian was made a sufficient crime, and sufferings were inflicted and endured, such as make us astonished to think what human nature on either side was capable of. But He who can make the wrath of man to praise Him overruled all for good. The patience and fortitude of the sufferers left an impression on their very enemies, and on the people in general, which nothing else could have done. That religion, they thought, must surely be true, for which these men are ready to endure so much, or, at all events, *they* must be sincere in believing it. We read of the very executioners themselves being led in some instances to become Christians. And as every real child of God, who lives long on earth, must expect discipline and affliction, because his Heavenly Father knows it to be needful for his soul's good ;—so for the Church in general, that is, the whole body of believers in any place. God sees that trial and affliction of some kind or other is needful to keep out hypocrites and false professors, and to prevent true Christians getting cold and worldly. It has always been found that a Church which has been long very prosperous begins to fall away, either in doctrine or practice. We shall soon meet with sad proofs of this.

There is another comforting thought on this subject. How strong is the evidence of the truth of our holy

religion *now*, when we look back on all the persecutions and difficulties it has surmounted, compared with what it would have been, if all things had from the first gone smoothly. Surely we may say with wise Gamaliel, "If this doctrine or this work had been of man, it would have come to nought." Only divine power could have kept divine truth alive on the earth, when all the arts of wicked men and wicked spirits were trying to extinguish it.

The fourth great persecution, under Marcus Antoninus, when, as we have seen, Polycarp became a martyr, was very severe and extensive. We read especially of terrible sufferings to which the people of Christ were exposed in France, or Gallia as it was then called. There were many believers in the city of Lyons, which even in those times was a place of importance, and also in the neighbouring town of Vienne. We have a record of their trials preserved in the usual form of an epistle,—“From the servants of Christ, sojourning in Vienne and Lyons in France, to the brethren in Asia Propria and Phrygia, who have the same faith and hope of redemption with us,” &c.

In this epistle a general account is given of the extreme hatred of the heathen against the Christians, who were first exposed to all manner of persecutions, plundering and indignity ;—then, as their enemies



grew bolder, were dragged before the magistrates, accused, and condemned to torture and death, while multitudes were destroyed by private assassins. Under these trials the faith of some failed, but most of them proved faithful to the end. Some of the most illustrious martyrs are particularly mentioned. Pothinus, the aged bishop of Lyons, upwards of ninety years old, very feeble and infirm, was dragged before the tribunal,—“His body was worn out indeed with age and disease, yet he retained a soul through which Christ might triumph.” He was insulted and ill-treated in every way, those near him striking him with hands and feet, those at a distance throwing stones and dirt; and at length was cast almost breathless into prison, where he died. To be a bishop or leader in any Church, was then no easy office. It required strong faith to stand in such a position, for although even humble believers were in much danger, there was no hope of escape for those in public situations, and everywhere, in persecuting times, these holy men were sought after as principal victims.

Sanctus, a deacon of Vienne, and Attalius, who is called “a pillar and support of the Church,” were tortured in the most cruel manner, for the amusement of the multitude in the amphitheatre. “To every question, Sanctus would only reply in Latin, ‘I am a Christian.’ This, he said, was to him both name,

and state, and race, and everything, and nothing else could the heathen draw from him. . . . Attalius also was vehemently demanded by the multitude. . . . He advanced with all the cheerfulness and serenity of a good conscience, an experienced Christian, and ever ready and active in bearing testimony to the truth. He was led round the amphitheatre, and a tablet was carried before him, inscribed in Latin, 'This is Attalius the Christian.' The rage of the people would have had him despatched immediately, but the governor understanding that he was a Roman, ordered him back to prison." Both of these martyrs, besides many other tortures, were roasted in a chair of iron, heated red hot. When we have read the accounts of their sufferings, we know not whether to wonder most at the power of Satan, hardening men's hearts so as to invent and commit such cruelty, or at the power of God, giving his saints grace and patience to endure such agonies.

A female martyr is made special mention of at Lyons, called Blondina. She seems to have been a servant, or slave, in a Christian family, and probably not strong in health or nerves, for the epistle says of her—"While we all feared, and among the rest her mistress according to the flesh, who herself was one of the noble army of martyrs, dreaded that she would not be able to witness a good confession, because of the weakness of her body, Blondina was endued with

so much fortitude, that those who successively tortured her from morning to night, were quite worn out with fatigue, and owned themselves conquered. . . . But the blessed woman, as a generous wrestler, recovered fresh vigour in the act of confession ; and it was an evident refreshment, support, and annihilation of all her pains to say, ' I am a Christian, and no evil is committed among us.' "

When fastened to a stake among the wild beasts, Blondina stretched out her hands in earnest prayer, so that she seemed as if suspended on a cross, and the other sufferers, it is said, were inspired with new energy, when they beheld with their bodily eyes, in the person of their sister, the figure of Him who was crucified for them. None of the beasts at this time would touch her, so she was taken down from the stake, and thrown into prison, reserved for further tortures. She and Ponticus, a boy of fifteen, were brought every day to the amphitheatre to witness the sufferings of their brethren. On the last day of the shows they were both tortured in a variety of dreadful ways. Blondina encouraged her young companion, and he was strengthened to endure to the end. " And now," the epistle goes on to say, " the blessed Blondina, last of all, as a generous mother having exhorted her children, and sent them before her victorious to the King, reviewing the whole series of their sufferings, hastened to undergo the same herself,

rejoicing and triumphing in her exit, as if invited to a marriage supper, not going to be exposed to wild beasts. After she had endured stripes, the tearing of the beasts, and the iron chair, she was inclosed in a net, and thrown to a bull, and having been some time tossed by the animal, and proving quite superior to her pains, through the influence of hope, and the realizing view of the objects of her faith and her fellowship with Christ, she at length breathed out her soul. Even her enemies confessed that no woman among them had ever suffered such and so great things." Thus was the strength of Christ, in a remarkable instance, made perfect in weakness.

The Christians were ever most desirous to perform the last duties to the remains of their martyred friends. Even this comfort was here denied them. "As for ourselves," they say, "our sorrow was greatly increased because we were deprived of the melancholy satisfaction of interring our brethren. Neither the darkness of the night could befriend us, nor could we prevail by prayers or by price. They watched the bodies with unremitting vigilance, as if to deprive them of sepulchre was to them an object of great importance. The bodies of the martyrs, having been contumeliously treated and exposed for six days, were burned and reduced to ashes, and scattered by the wicked into the Rhone, that not the least particle of them might appear on the earth any more." And

they did these things as if they could prevail against God, and prevent their resurrection ; and that they might deter others, as they said, from the hope of a future life."

The Church in Lyons, thus severely tried, seems to have been remarkable for its faith and piety, and freedom from already prevailing errors. The power of divine grace, as Milner says, " appears here little less than apostolical."

There is not much of special interest to record during the remainder of this century. The Emperor Commodus, who succeeded Marcus Antoninus, granted to the Church a season of peace and security. He was a very wicked man, and it is said that a wicked woman, who was a favourite of his, had for some reason not known, an interest in the Christians, and persuaded him to favour them. God's ways are not as ours, and he can make use of the most unlikely instruments to fulfil his purposes, and help his people in their distress.

Milner, in the ninth chapter of his history, gives an account of the internal dissensions and heresies which troubled the Church at this period. These of course were always most manifest in times of outward peace, and one blessed effect of persecution, was to separate heretics and hypocrites from among the faithful, and draw the attention of true believers away from comparative trifles to the great objects of faith and hope.

There was much disputing as to the proper time for observing Easter, in regard to which the Eastern and Western Churches differed in opinion. This question had been raised long before, but amicably settled by Polycarp of Smyrna, and Anicetus, bishop of Rome. It was now revived with a violence which it is sad to read of. "That so slight a subject," says Milner, "should appear of so great a moment at this time, seems no small proof that the power of true godliness had suffered some declension; and was an omen, towards the close of this century, of the decay of the happy effects of the first great effusion of the Spirit." Theodotus and Montanus were two heretical leaders. The first taught false doctrines in regard to the person of Christ; and the second was a fanatical enthusiast, calling himself a new prophet. But more dangerous to truth than either of these was a new school of philosophers, which at this period arose in Alexandria. They called themselves Eclectics, which means *choosers* or *selectors*, professing to be bound by no particular system, but to choose out truth for themselves, from the opinions of all sects, Pagan, Jewish, and Christian. Plato, the best of heathen philosophers, was their chief favourite. There was much in this scheme to please the natural pride of man, and to attract young inquiring minds.

The first principal leader among the Eclectics was Ammonius Saccus, a famous teacher in Alexandria.

Of this man Milner says—"Plato was his principal guide, but he invented many things of which Plato never dreamed. What his religious profession was is disputed among the learned. Undoubtedly he was educated as a Christian, . . . and it appears that he desired to be considered such. This man fancied that all religions, vulgar and philosophical, Grecian and barbarous, Jewish and Gentile, meant the same thing at bottom. He undertook, by allegorizing and subtilizing various faiths and systems, to make up a coalition of all, . . . and his followers were taught to look on Jew, philosopher, vulgar Pagan, and Christian, as all of the same creed."

It is easy to see how dangerous such teaching must have been; how utterly opposed to the spiritual and humbling doctrines of the gospel; how destructive of true piety in the hearts of those who were allured by its errors. There is still too much of the eclectic philosophy taught in our day, and it is still peculiarly dangerous and attractive to youthful minds. They have need to watch and pray against its delusions, to prove all things by the only infallible standard, the revealed word of God, and by his help, "hold fast" only those, regarding doctrine or practice, which he has pronounced to be truth and duty.

1







I.

MARTYRS OF ALEXANDRIA AND CARTHAGE.

WE now commence the third century of Christianity, and it seems a good time to consider the general character and customs, in ordinary life, of the primitive Church. For although, as we have seen, there was already much to lament over in the rise of doctrinal errors, and, as in all communities of sinful men, there must also have been many individual sins and infirmities, still there is reason to think that as a whole, these early Churches of the first three centuries, in faith and piety, in holiness of heart and life, excelled all that have followed in later times. They were purified in the furnace of sore persecutions; Christ was to them all in all; death was ever before their eyes, and eternal things felt to be abiding realities, while the things of time were looked upon as all uncertain and insignificant. Believers were then (and felt themselves to be) truly "as sheep in the midst of wolves," but they

acted out their high calling, as the lights of a dark world, "the salt of the earth," the "living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men;" and in regard to this we have the testimony not only of their own historians, but of their persecutors and enemies.

In dress and household arrangements, we are told that they followed the precept of Paul, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." Much luxury and display in such matters was at this time customary among the worldly both of Jews and Gentiles. The Christians at once set the example of plainness and simplicity, even when the contrast in itself exposed them to observation and danger. The same "moderation" was carried out in their daily meals, at which any kind of excess would have brought decided discredit upon a man's religious profession. Prayer was offered up before dinner by the master of the household, and during the repast portions of Scripture were generally read aloud either by a member of the family, or some person hired for the purpose. To have reading aloud during meals was a common custom among the ancients; but surely our modern practice of cheerful conversation, if of a profitable kind, is to be preferred. When the repast was concluded, all washed their hands, and the women veiled themselves, in token of reverence, the men remaining with uncovered heads, while the Sacred Volume was brought forward, and the head of the family read


aloud some passage, adding a short exhortation. Or this exercise was diversified by sacred music, of which they were excessively fond, literally "speaking to themselves in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs," while engaged in their ordinary employments.

Besides morning and evening family worship, there were stated hours during the day, the third, sixth, and ninth (with us nine, twelve, and three o'clock), when all who had time at their own disposal were accustomed to retire for private devotion; and many were in the habit of rising at midnight to engage in prayer and praise. A writer on this subject says, "Prayer indeed was the grand element that pervaded the life of the primitive Christians. So much did they familiarize themselves with its spirit and its sentiments, that they seemed to have cultivated the habit of constant mental intercourse with their heavenly Father. This diffused a sanctified influence over the whole tenor of their walk and conversation; "gave vigour to their faith, stability to their virtue, and fed like a perpetual spring all the streams of Christian activity and excellence for which they were so remarkable."

Their value for the Word of God was no less conspicuous. At that period the Scriptures were of course only in manuscript, so that copies were very scarce and very expensive. Those therefore who possessed such a treasure as an entire copy, and who

were able to read it (which multitudes of the humbler converts were not), used to be most earnest in instructing others. Large portions were diligently committed to memory by young and old, and it is said that many persons were able to repeat the whole Bible by heart !

It was not till far on in the third century that Christians possessed buildings openly appropriated for public worship. They met together at first in private houses, where the more wealthy members gladly dedicated an apartment for this sacred purpose; and in times of persecution they had recourse to sepulchral vaults and galleries, which abounded near Rome. They were accustomed to assemble at midnight on Saturdays, and spend the time in social devotional exercises, with intervals of solemn silence for private prayer, until the sun arose, when they separated, to meet again if possible at a mid-day service. The entire Sabbath, when practicable, was devoted to spiritual duties. Much of time in public was given to reading of Scripture, and the sermons, or exhortations, were generally brief, so that several were sometimes delivered at one meeting, the pastor often calling upon a stranger visitor or lay member of the Church to address them, as in the synagogue worship. Their attitude in prayer was often standing, with eyes raised to heaven, and hands extended in form of the cross. The Lord's Supper



was celebrated at each public meeting. Before the ordinance was administered the presiding ministers washed their hands, founding this practice on the words of the Psalmist, "I will wash mine hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord." Then the ministers saluted one another, and the men and women such of their own sex as stood beside them, "with a holy kiss." These actions were considered emblematical, the one of the purity, the other of the mutual love, which ought to reign among all true believers. After the communion service it was customary to send portions of the sacred elements by the deacons to such as were prevented attending by sickness, or as so often happened, by imprisonment for Christ's sake.

With regard to the Sacrament of Baptism there seems to be no doubt that it was customary in the early Church to baptize the children of Christians in infancy, although of course the greater number of converts were of mature years. When such a person professed his desire to renounce idolatry, he was subjected to a long course of preparatory instruction and discipline, sometimes extending to years, before being admitted into the Church. Those in this state of probation were called *catechumens*. In the warm climate of the East, the ordinance was usually administered in the form of immersion, and where there were no churches, in any place which circumstances

rendered convenient ; by a river side, or on the sea shore. But much superstition soon became connected with it, as we shall see afterwards.

Let us now consider some of the leading events and characters of this period.

The third century opened under the reign of Septimius Severus, a cruel persecutor. The Church in Lyons again suffered severely, and its Bishop, Irenæus, became a martyr. He was an eminent believer, a Greek by birth and education, accomplished in Grecian literature, but who "took pains to learn the barbarous dialect of Gaul, conformed himself to the rustic manners of an illiterate people, and renounced the politeness and elegant traits of his own country for the love of souls." He succeeded Pothinus about the year 169, and truly bore the burden and heat of the day, living through many dangers and distresses, from persecution without and heresy within. He had been a disciple of the venerable Polycarp, and a letter has been preserved in which he makes interesting allusions to his revered master.

"The instructions of our childhood," he says, "grow with our growth, and adhere to us most closely, so that I can describe the very spot in which Polycarp sat and expounded, and his coming in and going out, the very manner of his life and figure of his body, and the sermons which he preached to the multitude; how he related to us his converse with

John, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord; how he mentioned their particular expressions, and what things he had heard from them of the Lord, of his miracles and of his doctrine. As Polycarp had received from the eye-witnesses of the Word of Life, he told us all things agreeable to the Scriptures. These things then, through the mercy of God visiting me, I heard with seriousness; I wrote them not on paper, but on my heart; and ever since, through the grace of God, I have a genuine remembrance of them, and I can witness before God, that if that blessed Apostolical Presbyter had heard *some* of the doctrines which are now maintained, he would have cried out and stopped his ears, and in his usual manner have said, 'O good God, to what times hast thou reserved me, that I should endure these things!' And he would immediately have fled from the place in which he had heard such doctrines."

We may mention here the Christian historian Tertullian, who flourished at Carthage, in Africa, during the latter part of the second, and beginning of the third century. He is the first Christian Latin writer of the Church whose works have been preserved, and they are valuable in many respects; but his natural disposition appears to have been cold and severe, and his views of religion, and of human life, partake of the same character. He lived to an advanced age, and died a natural death.

In Alexandria, at this time, the persecution was very severe. A romantic story has been recorded, connected with one of the martyrs there, Potamiaena, a young girl remarkable for her beauty, virtue, and courageous faith. She was exposed to dreadful tortures, and at length burned alive along with her mother.

The heart of Basilides, a Roman soldier who presided at her execution, was much softened and attracted towards her. He did all in his power to lessen her sufferings, and to protect her from the insults of the mob. She thanked him when dying for his kindness, and said that after her departure she would entreat the Lord for his salvation. Some time afterwards, Basilides, when called along with his fellow soldiers to take a heathen oath, refused, and professed himself a Christian. They thought him in jest at first, but finding him serious, he was committed to prison. When questioned by the Christians who visited him there, as to the cause of his sudden conversion, he declared that Potamiaena, three days after her death, had appeared to him by night, and told him that she had fulfilled her promise, and that he should soon die. He continued faithful to the end, suffering martyrdom. The chief facts of this story are doubtless true. The Roman had been deeply affected by the sufferings and constancy of the youthful martyr, and thus led to consider seriously

the faith which sustained her soul. Her own promise to him is but a proof of how superstition was beginning to take root in the Church, and her appearing to him afterwards, if we are unwilling to allow of anything supernatural, may be easily accounted for by the supposition of a vivid dream, which the Holy Spirit was pleased to make the means of his conversion.

The Christians of Carthage were now remarkable for numbers and piety. They suffered greatly during this persecution. Among many others, we have very affecting details of the case of Vivia Perpetua, a young Carthaginian lady, eminent for rank and beauty. She was married, and had a young nursing infant. We hear nothing of her husband; but her father, himself a pagan, ardently loved her, and used every possible means, both by severe treatment and tender entreaties, to induce her to give up her faith. She was separated from her child, and thrown into prison along with several other Christians of inferior rank. They, being accustomed to hardships, had little to suffer there in comparison of Perpetua, who had been used to all the refinements and luxuries of high life. "I was tempted," she said, "for I had never been in such darkness before. O what a dreadful day! The excessive heat occasioned by the number of persons, the rough treatment of the soldiers, and finally anxiety for my child, made me

magistrate. Her great distress was about her infant, and with much difficulty she obtained permission to embrace it once more, and commit it to the care of her mother, who appears to have been a believer. Her father came to the prison, and with tender prayers and tears implored her to "lay aside her resentment," and not bring sorrow and disgrace upon her family. On the day of trial he again appeared, with his little grandson in his arms, and conjured the mother to have at least pity upon her child. He even attempted to draw her forcibly away, upon which the magistrate commanded him to be beaten, and the heart of Perpetua was thus in every way torn with anguish, although being supported by heavenly strength. She was enabled to continue firm in the faith.

She and her companions were condemned to be thrown to the wild beasts: and meanwhile sent back to prison. There they all joined in prayer for one of their number, a woman named Felicitas, who was expecting soon to have a child, and very desirous that this should be before her execution. Their supplications were heard, and before the day of the public shows came, a poor little baby was brought into the world, and given to the care of a pious woman in Carthage, who nursed it as her own. We naturally wish to know the future history of this child, whose birth took place in such sadly interesting circum-

stances, but nothing more is recorded. Surely, however, we may trust that she grew up in the faith of her martyred mother, and at last joined her in heaven.

When the day of execution came, we are told that Perpetua "went forward singing," with joyful composure of spirit. After being scourged severely, she and Felicitas were given to be tossed by a wild cow. Perpetua seemed quite raised above her sufferings, and hardly sensible of what was passing. She exhorted her fellow believer to continue unmoved in faith and love ;—and when an executioner was ordered to give the death blow, she herself guided his trembling hand. And thus she and the other martyrs were made more than conquerors, and entered into the joy of their Lord.

There is a strange fascination, to many minds, in these old martyr tales. We have cause to thank God that the records have been preserved, for they have been blessed to quicken the spiritual life in many a Christian soul, as well as to impress and awaken unbelievers, in all the succeeding ages of the Church's history. Being dead, the martyrs yet speak to us. "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end ; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."



II.

ORIGEN,

THE GREAT SCHOLAR OF THE EASTERN CHURCH.

HISTORY in every age, as has been already remarked, presents us with some individuals whose characters and actions render them conspicuous among their fellow-men, as we see "one star differ from another star in glory," when gazing on the clear midnight sky. In the period we are now considering, two men stand pre-eminent, exercising a great influence over the Church by their lives and writings,—Origen and Cyprian ; one in the Eastern, the other in the Western Church. Let us try to become somewhat acquainted with them.

The youth of Origen fell upon evil times. He was born in Alexandria in 185. His father, Leonidas, was a pious Christian, and appears also to have been a man of liberal mind, giving his son a good literary as well as Christian education. The boy, from his early years, showed no ordinary mental powers.

According to the pious custom of these days, to commit a portion of Scripture to memory was one of his daily exercises. Not content with learning the words, he desired to investigate the full meaning of each passage, and often embarrassed his father by questions which he was unable to answer. This, indeed, is not wonderful; for there are mysteries in the word of God, as in his works and ways, which the child and the man of genius must be alike content to receive in simple faith, and adore without comprehending. But the difficulties of young Origen must have been different from those of ordinary children.

Neander (the German Church historian) writes:—"Leonidas chid, indeed, his inconsiderate curiosity, and exhorted him to be satisfied, as became his years, with the literal sense; but he secretly rejoiced in the promising talents of the youth, and with a full heart thanked God that he had given him such a son. Often, it is said, when the boy was asleep, he would uncover his breast, kissing it as a temple wherein the Holy Spirit designed to prepare his dwelling, and congratulated himself on possessing such a treasure."

"The boy is father of the man;" and in these early traits we see the beginning of what developed into the chief fault of Origen's religious views in after life—too much of an allegorizing, speculative spirit.

He studied, besides, under Clement of Alexandria, a philosopher of the Eclectic school, who, though a very talented man, was obscure and mystic in his theology. Yet the influence of the pious Leonidas must have been great over his son. "At all events," says Neander, "this is clear; the religion of the heart was at first uppermost with Origen. This good teacher, also, must be numbered with those in whom the early cultivation of the feelings by a pious training has acted as a check on the too intellectual tendency of their later studies."

He was only sixteen, when a storm of persecution, under the Emperor Severus, arose, and burst with all its fury upon the Church of Alexandria. Although, as we have seen, other places also suffered severely, this city appears to have been the chief centre of persecution, and Christians were brought there from various parts of Egypt, to be publicly tortured. Leonidas was arrested, and thrown into prison. Origen, full of youthful zeal, panted for the glory of martyrdom, and wished to go before the authorities and avow himself a Christian, that he might meet death along with his father. His poor mother, whose distress may be imagined, could only keep him at home by concealing all his clothes. Leonidas was beheaded, his property confiscated, and his widow, with seven children, left in great poverty.

Origen, the eldest of the family, was then at the

age of seventeen. A rich and noble Christian lady treated him with much kindness, and received him into her house. But she also greatly patronized a philosopher, or teacher, one Paul of Antioch, a follower of the Gnostic heresy, whom she allowed to give lectures and hold meetings under her roof. These meetings Origen, unmoved by any fear of her displeasure, positively refused to attend, and openly expressed his abhorrence of the Gnostic errors. He was soon able to escape from a dependent condition, and maintain himself by giving instruction in Greek literature. The persecution was still going on, and he fearlessly exposed himself to danger, showing sympathy with the martyrs in every possible way, visiting them in their dungeons, and attending them to the place of execution. Finding that the office of catechist had been deserted, he himself undertook it, and even at this early age, such was the impression made by his force of character and consistent piety, that "multitudes crowded to hear him, and many of the heathen were converted to Christianity."

Demetrius, the Bishop of Alexandria, now committed the school entirely to his charge. There must have been little emolument connected with the office, for we read that "he maintained himself by the sale of his classical library." "Thus he lived many years, an amazing monument at once both of industry and of self-denial. Not only the day, but the

greater part of the night, was by him devoted to religious study, and he practised, with literal conscientiousness, our Lord's rules of not having two coats, nor two pairs of shoes, and of not providing for futurity. He was inured to cold, nakedness, and poverty. He offended many by his unwillingness to receive their gratuities. He abstained from wine; and, in general, lived so abstemiously as to endanger his life. Many persons imitated his excessive austerities, and were at that time honoured with the name of philosophers, and some of them patiently suffered martyrdom.*


Origen soon became much engrossed in literary labour, collecting, comparing, and correcting the various Scripture manuscripts, and writing comments upon them. Neander calls him "the creator of sacred literature among the Christians." At one time he appears to have adhered too much to a literal interpretation of many things in Scripture, but eventually he fell into the opposite error, and became too speculative and obscure in his views. We shall not enter into a discussion of the doctrines he held and taught, as this would neither be interesting nor profitable. There can be no doubt that he was himself a converted and holy man; but it cannot be denied that he was often led astray by love of philosophy and pride of intellect from "the simplicity that is in

* Milner.

Christ;" and that not only his own soul thus suffered loss, but harm must have been done to many others who looked up to him as their teacher and oracle.

Ambrosius, a wealthy Alexandrian, and follower of the Gnostic heresy, was brought by Origen to more correct views of gospel truth, and became his warm friend and literary helper, devoting both time and money to assist his labours. He furnished him, we are told, with seven scribes, who were to relieve each other as his amanuensis. Origen says at this period, "The collection of manuscripts leaves us almost no time to eat; and after meals I can neither go out nor enjoy a season of rest, but even at those times I am compelled to continue my philological investigations, and the correction of the manuscripts. Even the night is not granted me for repose, but a great part of it is claimed for these philological inquiries. I will not mention the time from early in the morning till the ninth and tenth hour of the day, for all who take pleasure in such labours employ these hours in the study of the divine word and in reading."


Meanwhile the tyrant Severus died, after a reign of eighteen years; and under several of the succeeding emperors the Church was permitted to enjoy a long interval of repose. Origen travelled to various places, in order better to prosecute his literary undertakings. At Cæsarea, about the year 230, he was ordained as priest by the bishops of Cæsarea and



Jerusalem, being then at the age of forty-five. But his own bishop, Demetrius, who seems to have become jealous of his growing power and popularity, objected to this step, and found some pretext for calling it illegal. Not content with this, he accused Origen of heresy in doctrine, and the final result was his formal ejection from the Church of Alexandria. It is a painful story, and we have no very definite or trustworthy accounts of the whole matter.

He withdrew to Palestine, where he continued to preach and to write, and was highly esteemed by the Churches there and in Arabia, who took his side in the doctrinal disputes. His labours were great, and his writings voluminous. Many of the latter have been lost, which Milner considers as not much to be regretted.

He was far advanced in life, when severe persecution again broke out under the Emperor Decius. His fury was specially directed against those eminent for rank, zeal, and position in the Church. The venerable Origen was, of course, not spared. He was thrown into prison, and very severely tortured. But the God and Saviour, whom he had from youth loved and served, did not forsake him in old age. He was strengthened to witness a good confession, and to exhort and comfort others. We have no particular account of his latter days; but as far as can be made out, his life was spared at this time, though



his death, not long after, in the seventieth year of his age, was probably hastened by the sufferings he had undergone.

His character is thus given by Milner, who is certainly not a partial friend:—

“Origen’s views of the peculiar truths of Christianity were, to say no more, too faint and general, nor even *sufficiently* distinguished from moral and philosophical religion. He bore persecution, when young, with much zeal and honesty; but he lived many years in peace and prosperity. Much respected and sought after by philosophers, highly esteemed and honoured by courts and by the great, he lived a scholastic rather than an active life in the Church; always fully employed, indeed, but more like a man of letters than a minister of the gospel; ever bent on promoting truth and holiness, so far as he knew them, but always leaving one’s mind dissatisfied on account of the defectiveness of his views. His last scene is the most satisfactory and most decisively Christian. He suffered persecution then with the patience and honesty of a martyr, and proved, *indeed*, whose disciple he was on the whole. . . . After all the best defence of this good man consists in the general holiness of his life, and in his patient sufferings for the faith of Christ in old age. And I rejoice that amidst all the trash with which his writings abound, we have yet this unquestionable testimony,

that he kept the commandments of God, and had the faith of Jesus."

Such is the history, in mere outline, of one of the greatest fathers in the early Church. When older, if their taste leads them to this department of study, our young readers will form an estimate for themselves of his doctrines and attainments. Meantime, they may safely seek to imitate Origen in his early piety, his diligence in study, his self-denial, his boldness in confessing Christ before men, and zeal in devoting all his talents to what he considered the prosecution of heavenly truth. But there is no perfect human model; and while admiring his virtues, we must watch and pray against his errors, in being too much led away by intellectual temptations, and the attractions of worldly philosophy.





III.

CYPRIAN,


THE FAITHFUL WESTERN PASTOR.

LET us now turn to Cyprian of Carthage, the great contemporary of Origen. At this period the Christian Churches, like the Roman empire, are generally spoken of under two great divisions, the eastern and western. "The east and the west," says Milner, "beheld at the same time these two men (Origen and Cyprian), in talents, activity, and attainments, much superior to the rest of the Christian world." The historian goes on to draw a long comparison between them greatly in favour of Cyprian, for whom he appears to have a peculiar admiration. "There may have been," he says, "as pious and holy men in the interval between the apostles and him, but we have no opportunities of knowing any other Christian so well."

Unlike Origen, we have no information regarding Cyprian's childhood and youth. We first hear of him at the time of his conversion, which happened about the year 276. He was then in the prime of life,

and in thirteen years longer his work on earth was done. But much may be accomplished in a brief space of time when heart and soul are truly devoted to the service of Christ, and thus it was with Cyprian.

He was a man of wealth and rank in the city of Carthage, and a professor of oratory and rhetoric. We are not told how he first came under Christian influence and instruction, but the instrument of his ~~conversion~~ was one Cæcilius, a Carthaginian presbyter. Cyprian, as a heathen, was considered an upright and estimable character; although, in a letter to his friend Donatius, written soon after his baptism, he expresses very deep views of sin, and of his own former sinfulness and inability to save himself. "The new birth," he says, "made me a new creature indeed. Immediately, and in an amazing manner, dubious things began to be cleared up; things once shut were opened, dark things shone forth, and what before seemed difficult and even impossible now appeared easy and practicable. I saw how that which was born after the flesh, and had lived ensnared by wickedness, was 'of the earth earthy,' but that the new life, now animated by the Holy Ghost, began to be of God. You know and recollect as perfectly as I do my conversion from a deadly criminal state to a state of lively virtue; you know what the opposite states have done for me,



what they have taken away, and what they have conferred, and therefore I need not proclaim it. To boast of one's own praises is odious, though that cannot be called an expression of boasting but of gratitude which ascribes nothing to the virtue of man, but professes all to proceed from the gift of God."

Having passed from darkness into light, he "walked in the light" with holy joy and ardour. Full of love to Christ, a desire to follow him fully, he began at once a life of devoted labour and obedience. Taking the command literally, "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell all thou hast, and give to the poor," he sold two landed estates in order to be more free from earthly cares, and to distribute the money in charity. He was married, and had to encounter some opposition on the part of his wife, who appears either not to have entered into his views, or to have thought that he carried them too far. But by the people in general, and especially by the poor and afflicted, he was soon greatly beloved, and so great was the impression of his piety and zeal, that two years after his conversion we find him first chosen as a presbyter and then as Bishop of Carthage. "It was with no satisfaction," writes Milner, "that he observed the design of the people to choose him for their bishop. He retired to avoid solicitation. His house was besieged, his retreat rendered impossible. He yielded at length,

and with much reluctance accepted the *painful pro-*
mission. For at the time it."

Let us glance at the state of public affairs at this period. God had so restrained the Roman emperors who had reigned after Severus that though some of them were monsters of wickedness, they had not acted as open persecutors of the Church. After three short reigns of this description comes that of Alexander Severus who was considered an excellent moral character and whose mother, Mammaea, is called by Eusebius "a religious woman." Having accompanied her son on a visit to Antioch, she sent for Origen, desiring to see and converse with him. He went and remained some time; but though we may hope that good was done by his instructions to the princess and the court we hear of no decisive results; she at least never made an open profession of Christianity.

In the year 235 Alexander was succeeded by his murderer, Maximin. The Christians suffered considerably during his reign, which was mercifully short. Then followed several other brief reigns, till in 244 the Emperor Philip ascended the throne. He was a decided friend of Christianity, and Eusebius even calls him a Christian. This fact, however, does not appear proved, some of his actions seeming inconsistent with it. Milner considers that he may have been a catechumen at the time of his death. One

thing is evident, that the spread of the gospel throughout the Roman world must now have been such that even heathen rulers, from worldly motives, thought it advisable to countenance their Christian subjects rather than crush them.

It was in the year 278, shortly before the death of Philip, that Cyprian was elected bishop of his native city, which, from the position Carthage then held among the western Churches, was no small honour, and no easy post. He felt that the duty which he reluctantly undertook to discharge was important and arduous. The Christians of Carthage, during a period of much outward rest and prosperity, had greatly fallen back in spiritual things. Worldliness in many forms prevailed among them, and open sins were not wanting. "Each one," he writes, "had been bent on improving his patrimony, and had forgotten what believers had done under the apostles, and what they ought always to do. The pastors and deacons each forgot their duty. Works of mercy were neglected, and discipline was at the lowest ebb. Luxury and effeminacy prevailed, fraud and deceit were practised among brethren."


He endeavoured, according to the apostolic injunction, to be himself "an example unto the flock." His friend and biographer, Pontius, thus describes him,— "His looks had the due mixture of gravity and cheerfulness, so that it was doubtful whether he was more

worthy of love or of reverence. His dress also was correspondent to his looks. He had renounced the secular pomp to which his rank in life entitled him, yet he avoided affected penury." We may indeed, as Milner remarks, observe the wisdom and goodness of God in preparing such a man by his grace for such times, and raising him in providence to such a post of authority and influence.

But before he had laboured long enough to effect much good, the Emperor Philip died, and was succeeded by Decius. Then burst forth a storm of persecution the most dreadful that the Church had yet experienced, aiming at the destruction of the very name of Christianity. As might be expected, coming at a time of such general backsliding, its results were at first deplorable, and multitudes fell back into idolatry, or at least denied Christ.

Believers of rank and influence were exposed to peculiar danger. Fabian, bishop of Rome, became a martyr, and at Carthage the danger to Cyprian was soon so imminent that he considered it his duty to save his life by withdrawing into retirement.

"He was never more active," says Milner, "than in his retreat. Nothing of moment occurred in ecclesiastical affairs either in Africa or Italy with which he was unacquainted; and his counsels, under God, were of the greatest influence in both countries." Many of his letters have been preserved, and are full of



interesting historical information as well as pious sentiments. But he had many cares and trials, besides the great one of separation from his beloved flock. Painful divisions arose among them, and a party was formed against himself by some of the inferior clergy, who had been from the first jealous of his early elevation to the bishopric. These endeavoured to misrepresent his motives for retiring from Carthage, and to contest his authority. Neander considers that he, on the other side, was led to press the point of his episcopal authority too far, and that sometimes, "in the bishop appointed by God himself, and acting in the name of Christ, he forgot the *man*, still living in the flesh, and exposed, like all other men, to the temptation of sin." But this Milner is very unwilling to allow.

It is unnecessary to enter into details on the subject, yet it can be easily explained that one great point of dispute was concerning the proper treatment of *the lapsed*,—that is, those who, under the first violence of persecution, had fallen away from the faith, but who now professed repentance and a desire to be restored to communion with the Church. Were they to be rejected altogether as unworthy? or welcomed back at once? or subjected to a course of probation? These were new and difficult questions. Cyprian looked upon the sin of apostasy in a most serious light, and without forbidding them all hope,

recommended their being made to wait till the return of autumn tranquillity should admit of their cases being well examined, as some doubtless were much more guilty than others. In the meantime they had abundant opportunities of giving practical proof of their penitence and sincerity, and "he who cannot endure the heat may obtain the crown of martyrdom."

But some of these men becoming impatient, and stirred up by the enemies of the bishop, accused him of over severity, and tried to gain to their side the influence of another important party called the *Compromissarii*—that is those who, having proved faithful to the Emperor, were now for his sake subjected to torture and imprisonment, or on the point of martyrdom. Some of them were persuaded to presume upon the right to interfere, which their suffering constancy was supposed to have given them, and from mistaken charity or less worthy motives, they recommended, and even enjoined, that upon their authority alone many of the lapsed should at once be admitted to the holy ordinance of communion. Thus Cyprian, who could not approve of such irregular proceedings, was at once accused of severity to the penitents, and want of reverence for the confessors.

Meanwhile the violence of persecution beginning to abate, he hoped soon to be able to return to his people. But before this was practicable matters had

come to a crisis, and a large body separated themselves from his authority, under the leadership of one of the deacons, named Felicissimus. This seems to have been the first instance of *schism* or *dissent* occurring in the Christian Church; of men separating themselves from the general Church, not from difference as to doctrine, but as to discipline. We must always recollect this distinction between dissent and heresy. For this first instance of the former there appears no good reason or excuse, and we must sadly recognise in it the work of the great enemy, ever ready to take advantage of human weakness and passion, and to be sowing discord among brethren. We need not enlarge further on these divisions. The true Church of Christ in our own times is divided into various sections, in each of which the Lord has many faithful pastors and devoted servants. The right of private judgment as to which of these he should join is the sacred privilege of every believer. But it ought to be exercised with great solemnity; and no young person should separate from the communion, if an evangelical one, in which he has been brought up, without much serious consideration and earnest prayer.

Besides the first case of dissent, Milner considers that the first rise of monastic superstition may be found in the days of Decius. The persecution raged in Egypt with great fury. A young Christian in that

country, named Paul, had been left heir to a large fortune at an early age. He was gentle in disposition, of deep piety, fond of study and meditation. An unworthy relative turned informer against him in order to obtain his estate. Paul hearing of this, sought refuge among the desert mountains of the Thebais, where he found a safe retreat, and became so attached to it that he declined returning to social life after the danger was over. He lived ninety years in solitude, dying at the age of one hundred and thirteen. "This is the first distinct account," says Milner, "of an hermit in the Christian Church." And he adds that there can be no doubt as to the genuine piety of Paul, while his conduct, and that of those who soon began to imitate his example, is not much to be wondered at when we consider the times in which they lived, and might at first arise from good motives, though it soon degenerated into a self-righteous superstition, and became a fruitful source of error and sin.

At length a respite was granted to the suffering Church of Christ by the cruel Decius being called away from Rome to repel an invasion of the Goths, and Cyprian returned to Carthage. But to give a sufficient account of his remaining years would make this chapter too long.



IV.

MARTYRDOMS OF CYPRIAN, CYRIL, AND NICEPHORUS.

THE latter years of Cyprian were chiefly occupied by business, which, though most important in itself, cannot have much interest for youthful readers. The affairs of his own charge, as we have seen, were in a very unsettled state ; the seceding party, under Felicissimus, having actually appointed a bishop of their own, named Fortunatus, in open opposition to Cyprian's authority. A schism of the same description had taken place in the Church at Rome, but with this difference, that though in both cases the treatment of *the lapsed* was the great matter of dispute, the Romish bishop, Cornelius, was not accused like Cyprian of over severity, but exactly the opposite fault. This is called in Church history the Novatian schism, from the name of the person who was elected bishop in opposition to Cornelius. Cyprian laboured much in endeavouring to restore tranquillity and order. Novatian, though too severe and ascetic in his views,

appears to have been a true Christian. He died a martyr about the same time with Cyprian; and shortly before that his rival Cornelius died in exile for Christ's sake. Milner remarks: "It will be a grateful refreshment to the reader to pause for a moment, and contemplate these three men meeting in a better world, clothed with the garments of Jesus, and in him knowing their mutual relation, which prejudice hindered in this mortal scene of strife, infirmity, and imperfection."

Notwithstanding all these troubles, we cannot doubt that the Decian persecution was productive of good as well as evil to the Church of Christ. Hypocrites and mere formal professors were exposed and shaken off, while the faith of true believers, severely tried, proved itself real and precious. Decius died in battle after a reign of two years and a half, and was succeeded by Gallus, who was also a persecutor, though not with such bitter enmity. Cyprian, by his letters, strove to comfort and animate his afflicted brethren in exile and suffering. There are some beautiful passages in those written at this time. Here is an extract:—

"Let that man fear to die who has a second death to undergo, who is not born of water and of the Spirit, who is not a partaker of the cross and passion of Christ. To such an one life is indeed a desirable object, because it delays his condemnation;

but what have good men to dread from death? *They* are called by it to an eternal refreshment. . . . We should consider, and think again and again that we have renounced the world, and live here as strangers. What stranger loves not to return to his own country? Let us rejoice in the day that summons us to our home. There a great number of our friends await us. What raptures of mutual joy, to see and embrace one another!"

Gallus, after a short and miserable reign, was killed in 253, and was succeeded by Valerian, who for more than three years proved a friend and protector of the Christians, of whom there were many in his own household. During this tranquil season a council of bishops was held in Africa, to settle some doubtful questions, and we are told that there were sixty present, with Cyprian at their head. This gives us a cheering idea of the spread of the gospel in the north of Africa at that time. It is sad to reflect what darkness now reigns where the true light once shone so brightly.

The peace enjoyed under Valerian was of short continuance. The emperor's disposition towards his Christian subjects was quite changed by the arts of a wicked favourite, and he became their bitter enemy. The noble Bishop of Carthage, who had been so wonderfully preserved by Providence during former persecutions, now fell a victim. He was in

the first place banished to Curubis, a sea-port town fifty miles from Carthage. Here he remained eleven months, and was often visited by his Christian friends, while he sought by his writings to sustain the faith of those suffering at a distance. Many, both of pastors and people, had been sent to labour in exile in the copper mines. Cyprian sent a large sum of money for their relief from his own income, as well as the Church funds, and a letter full of consolation. "In the mines," he says, "the body is refreshed not by beds and pillows, but by the comforts and joys of Christ. Your limbs, wearied with labour, recline upon the ground, but it is no punishment to be there with Christ. If the outward man be defiled, the inner man is but the more purified by the Spirit from above. Your bread is scanty, but man lives not by bread alone, but by the word of God. You are in want of clothing to defend you from the cold; but he who has put on Christ has ornament and clothing enough. Even though, my dearest brethren, you cannot now celebrate the communion of the Lord's Supper, your faith need feel no want. . . . You offer and present yourselves to God, a holy and lively sacrifice. What power have you now in a victorious conscience—what triumph in your hearts, when you can walk through the mines with enslaved bodies, but with hearts conscious of mastery, when you know that Christ is with

you, rejoicing in the patience of his servants, who in his footsteps and by his ways are entering into the kingdom of heaven."

Such was the general admiration of Cyprian's Christian character, that even his enemies appear to have treated him with a measure of respect and leniency. He was permitted for a short time to return to Carthage, and when imminent danger again threatened him there, some of his old friends, still Pagans, offered to conceal him in their country houses. But he declined availing himself of their kindness, considering it as his duty to be found at his post.

The Roman pro-consul soon visited Carthage, and the bishop was seized and brought before him. "The news spread through the city, the celebrity of the bishop on account of his good works drew prodigious crowds to the scene, not only of Christians but of infidels, who revered eminent virtue in distress." To all questions and accusations he replied with holy firmness and composure, and when sentence of death was pronounced, only said, "God be praised!"

He was immediately led away to execution, attended by a troop of soldiers; while a multitude of the people followed him, crying, "Let us die with our holy bishop." The scene of death was a plain near the city, surrounded by trees, into the branches

of which many spectators climbed. The martyr fell on his knees and commended his soul to God; then ordered a sum of money to be given to the executioner, calmly took off his upper garment, bound a napkin over his own eyes, and requested some Christian friend to bind his hands. Their feelings at such a moment may be better imagined than described; the one who reports the scene expresses himself as wishing to have died with their pastor. He was beheaded with a sword, and thus by a more gentle dismissal than many of his brethren, this faithful servant of Christ was called from labour and conflict to the joy of his Lord. His memory will be held in everlasting remembrance by the Church on earth, and if there are degrees of glory in heaven, he must there shine as one of the brightest "stars, for ever and ever."

"As a Christian bishop," writes Milner, "scarcely any age has seen his superior. . . . He may safely be recommended as a model to all pastors, and particularly to those of rank and dignity throughout Christendom. Whoever feels a desire to serve God in the most arduous and important of all professions, may profitably—next after the study of the Sacred Oracles—give days and nights to Cyprian's writings; yet no man must be expected to relish them thoroughly unless he himself has experienced the new birth unto righteousness. Contemplate—study

the character of the prelate of Carthage, and you will learn what Christian bishops once were, and what they still ought to be."


The special interest attached to Cyprian has made us overlook other individual cases of suffering and martyrdom in his time. Of these, however, there are many records preserved. We shall mention only two, which occurred during Valerian's persecution.

One is the case of a very youthful martyr, spoken of by historians as a mere child, named Cyril, in the town of Cæsarea in Cappadocia. Like Origen, at a very early age his heart was renewed by the Holy Spirit, and he openly professed himself a Christian: nor could threatenings or even blows make him keep silence on the subject of his faith. We are told that he was persecuted by his young companions, and that at length his father expelled him from his home. He was then brought before the Roman judge, who, compassionating his tender age, counselled him to "be wise," and return home, assuring him that if he confessed his errors all would be forgiven. "I rejoice to bear your reproaches," replied the young confessor: "God will receive me; I am not sorry that I am expelled out of our house: I shall have a better mansion. I fear not death, because it will introduce me into a better life." He was then bound and led as it were to execution, but the

soldiers received secret orders to bring him back again, supposing that the sight of the flames would be sufficient to overcome his resolution. The humane judge then continued his remonstrances: but in vain. "Your fire and your sword," said the boy, "do not_terrify me; I go to a better home, to more excellent riches than you can offer. Dispatch me quickly, that I may enjoy them." The surrounding spectators wept. "You should rather rejoice," he said; "ye know not what a city I am going to inhabit—what a hope is mine."

So, followed by the admiration and tears of the whole city, he went to win the martyr's crown. Who can tell how great may have been the effect produced by such an instance of youthful faith and constancy; how many souls might date their own believing unto life from the day of the boy Cyril's death?

The other martyr tale is a very different one. In the town of Antioch two men—Sapricius and Nicephorus—the first holding office in the Church, the other a layman, had been united in the most intimate friendship. But some misunderstanding occurred between them, and the consequence was such a complete estrangement that they would not even salute one another in the street. At last Nicephorus felt himself to be in fault, and made repeated attempts to be reconciled to his friend, even



going to his house, throwing himself at his feet, and entreating forgiveness for the Lord's sake. But the presbyter was obstinate, and haughtily refused his petition.

Then came the days of sudden and sore persecution, when every man's faith was tried as by fire. Sappricius was carried before the governor, and ordered to offer idolatrous sacrifice. He boldly refused, and avowed his faith. "Perish idols," he cried, "which can neither do good nor harm!" After being tortured he was ordered to be beheaded. Nicephorus hearing of this, ran up to him as they were leading him away, and implored him not to leave the world without extending forgiveness to his penitent friend. He prayed in vain; yet notwithstanding the scorn and ridicule of the executioners, he persevered in following to the place of death, and there renewed his entreaties, pleading the very words of the Lord, "Ask, and it shall be given you." How proud and hard the heart must have been which at such an hour could still remain cold and unrelenting!

A strange scene followed, in which we see plainly the righteous judgment of God. The courage of Sappricius suddenly gave way before the immediate prospect of death: he recanted, and promised to sacrifice to the idols. His distressed friend, in much amazement, in vain exhorted him to con-

stancy. Then, as if by an irresistible impulse, *he* turned to the executioner and exclaimed, "I believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he hath renounced." And he bravely submitted to the death from which the other had shrunk faithlessly back. Thus the last was made first, and the first last, and a lesson was left to succeeding generations of how those who proudly refuse pardon to an erring brother can never expect support or mercy in their own hour of need, from Him who in dying prayed for his murderers, and who tells us to forgive one another "unto seventy times seven." If Sappricius lived to repent, how humbling, how overwhelming must his self-reproach and remorse have been!

The cruel Valerian, after three years spent in persecution, was taken prisoner by Sapor, king of Persia, who it is said used to make his neck serve as a footstool to mount his horse, and at length ordered him to be flayed alive. When we consider how he must have known the truth, in the days when he respected and protected his Christian subjects, we find in his after conduct so much of sin against light and knowledge, that his dreadful end looks like an instance of providential retribution.

A long season of tranquillity was now granted to the Church, the principal events of which we must next consider.



V.

FORTY YEARS OF REST.

WE have still forty years of the third century to consider, during which, Milner remarks, "we behold a new scene, Christians legally tolerated under a Pagan Government for so long a period." Gallienus, the Roman Emperor, son and successor to Valerian, though by no means a good moral man, proved a real friend to the Church. By formal edicts he stopped persecution, and gave the exiled bishops legal permission to return to their people. He professed himself to be a man of taste and a philosopher, and looking upon Christians as a new philosophic sect of good harmless character, considered it right to extend to them full toleration. His example was followed by several of his successors, and thus a time of more complete security was permitted to the servants of Christ than they had ever before enjoyed.

One interesting story of martyrdom is recorded, as having occurred in Palestine during the reign of

Gallienus, perhaps before it was fully known that persecution was to be stopped. At Cæsarea, a brave Roman soldier, named Marius, of a noble wealthy family, was called to the office of centurion. Another soldier came forward, saying that Marius was legally disqualified, being a Christian, and that he himself, as next in rank, ought to be preferred. The governor, Achaëus, then questioned Marius as to his religion, and he confessed himself to be a believer in Christ. He was told the penalty, and allowed three hours for deliberation. The Bishop of Cæsarea, Theotecus, hearing of what had happened, immediately came to him, led him into the house of God, and there, placing a Testament beside his sword, desired him to choose between them. The soldier, without hesitation, grasped the book of life. "Hold fast there," said Theotecus, "to Him whom you have chosen, and you shall soon enjoy Him. He will strengthen you, and you shall depart in peace." We can imagine how the remainder of the three hours would be spent. When the time was expired, Marius, summoned to the tribunal, boldly confessed his faith anew, received sentence of condemnation, and was beheaded.

His was a noble choice, yet surely a wise one too. "For what is a man profited, though he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

This long period of the Church's outward tran-

quillity proved unfavourable to its inward progress in piety and holiness. Various corruptions, evils, and heresies soon began to appear in many places. Grave errors spread in the Church of Antioch, under the heretical teaching of its bishop, Paul of Samosata. He was a man most unworthy to hold so high an office—haughty, vain, ambitious, and immoral, though gifted with much talent and eloquence, such as often gained him popular applause. His vanity was much flattered by the attentions of the celebrated Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, who desired his instructions in Christianity. Alas, that a scholar of such importance should not have found a better teacher!

In doctrine Paul appears to have been what we should now call a Socinian, denying the proper divinity of our Lord. He was accused of heresy in 264 before a council of bishops, ministers, and deacons, held at Antioch. He professed repentance and conviction of error, with so much appearance of sincerity, that he was at the time believed, and allowed to retain his charge. But in a few years, his sins both of life and doctrine, becoming intolerable, a second council was called to consider his case. During the interval, several very distinguished men in the Church had died, and it was feared that there would now be much difficulty in bringing about the conviction of the eloquent deceitful Paul.

There was a powerful advocate of truth in the person of a presbyter named Melchion, who, besides other gifts, possessed great powers of argument. He was raised to the episcopate and after long discussion, the Arianizing bishop was compelled to appear in the synod, and was finally expelled from the office. A new bishop was appointed in his room. For the time which he had sown among the people had now moved roots of bitterness, bearing fruit in a later time.

When we enter upon another century, we find again several eminent individuals who were at the time lights in the Church and the world.

One of these was Diodorus, who for seventeen years presided over the Church of Alexandria. He was highly renowned and esteemed, and his opinion considered of much weight on all occasions of difficulty. He inspired from his charity and moderation, along with firmness in the faith. He was a disciple of Origen, whom he ever deeply loved and revered. He tells us of himself that he was brought to faith in the gospel in the way of pure examination, having impartially examined all other systems of religion; and in after life he continued to investigate all forms of heresy with a minuteness that might have proved dangerous to a less strong mind. This circumstance, however, was the means of his being of essential

service to the Church, both by his counsels and writings.

He was preserved in a very providential manner during the Decian persecution. Under that of Valerian he suffered much, and was sent, along with many of his brethren, into exile. He frankly confesses how greatly at one time his spirit was depressed, but tells how God overruled all for good, and gave him an opportunity of preaching the gospel to those who had never heard it before, with no small success. He was restored to his charge by the edict of Gallienus, and died at a great age in 267, just about the time when the first council was held at Antioch on the case of the heretic Paul. He was unable, from his infirmities, to attend in person, but sent a letter of advice, and addressed the Church of Antioch without taking any notice of the bishop. This was his last act of public service.

Another eminent character of the same period is Gregory, surnamed Thaumaturgus, or the Wonder-worker, from the miracles he is said to have performed. He was the son of a noble and wealthy family in Neo-Cæsarea, the capital of Cappadocia. His father, whom he lost when only fourteen, had educated him in paganism. Young Gregory, or Theodore, as he was then called, had great talents, and looked forward to a brilliant worldly career. He applied himself to the study of rhetoric or philo-

sophy, and appears to have also soon become interested in Christianity, though without openly professing it.

Family circumstances, in the good providence of God, led him to take a journey to Cæsarea, which changed the whole tenor of his after life. Here he met with Origen, who then resided and taught in that city, and became powerfully attracted by the influence of that great man, who, on his side, quickly perceived the talents of the young stranger, and took a special interest in him. A strong bond of sympathy and affection sprung up between them, which Gregory himself compares to the friendship of David and Jonathan. The result, through the blessing of the Holy Spirit, was his being truly converted to the truth as it is in Jesus, and trained as a peculiar blessing and ornament of the Church.

After spending, along with his brother, eight years in sacred study at Cæsarea, he felt it necessary to return to home duties, and parted with deep sorrow from his beloved friend and teacher. "This man," he says of Origen, "had received from God that greatest of gifts, the call to be to men an interpreter of the words of God; to understand God's word as God speaks it, and to announce it to men as man can understand it." In a farewell address he exclaims,—"Do thou, beloved head, stand up and dismiss us with thy prayer. As by thy holy doctrines thou

hast all the long time we have been with thee guided us to salvation, so now that we are to leave thee, guide us to salvation with thy prayers. Give us over, and commend us, or rather give us back to that God who conducted us to thee. Pray of him, as a consolation for our separation from thee, to send with us a good angel who may guide us. But pray of him also to bring us once more back to thee, for the simple assurance of this would be our greatest consolation."

A letter has been preserved from Origen to his pupil after his return home, full of paternal affection, exhorting him to devote his talents to the glory of God, and to make himself master of everything in science and philosophy which he could render of any use in the service of Christ. "But before all things else, my son," he says, "study the sacred Scriptures, and let them be to thee a constant study. . . . And if thou studiest the Holy Scriptures with a believing temper of mind, well pleasing to God, then, whenever anything in them seems shut up from thee, knock and it shall be opened to thee by the porter of whom Jesus speaks in John x. 3, 'To him the porter openeth.'"

Gregory did not disappoint the expectations of his distinguished teacher. He entered the ministry, and was led to undertake the charge of his native city of Neo-Cæsarea. It was a large and populous place full

of ~~his~~ continuing then only seventeen years. His work was truly that of a mission-
ary, and others consider that his sit-
ing down testifies that if the first gospel pre-
achers it is very possible that he was like the
Apostles with numerous gifts, as the accounts
have not reserved of the miracles he is
now confirmed, appear to be well authenti-
cated. I may say, I am certain that his success
in his mission was remarkable, and he was
well loved by a numerous congregation.

He lived through the sad times of perse-
cution which he considered a test for himself.
He was very young and weak in his
early years of life. They had to endure
affliction, but were at length brought back to
own him in peace, and he was long spared to
see them, while visited upon by the Chris-
tians as "one of his greatest luminaries." He
was at the first Council of Antioch against
Simonism, but died before the second. It
was shortly before his death he inquired parti-
cularly whether there were any persons in the city
remaining idolaters, and being told there were
seventeen in all, he sighed, and appealed to
how much grief he felt that there should be any
yet expressed deep thankfulness, that when
first coming there he found only seventeen Chris-

he should now leave only the same number of Pagans.

Another remarkable individual of this period, who also lived far into the next century, was Anthony the Egyptian, who may be considered the founder of monastic institutions. Paul, as we have seen, was the first Christian hermit; but he and his immediate followers lived each alone, while Anthony attracted many such ascetics together, and formed them into regular communities.

He was born about 251, of an old Coptic family, and left an orphan before his twentieth year, with a large fortune, and the charge of an only sister. From childhood he had shown deep religious feeling, and taken little interest in worldly concerns. When left his own master, he considered it right to follow literally the directions of our Lord to the rich young ruler, and accordingly sold all his earthly possessions, distributing the money to the poor, and only retaining a very small portion for his sister's maintenance. He placed her to be educated in a society of pious women, and then withdrew to solitude, providing for his own bare necessities by the labour of his hands.

Many strange incredible stories are recorded of his excessive austerities, and his spiritual conflicts and temptations. Indeed he is such a favourite saint with the Roman Catholics, that it is difficult to

ascertain truth from falsehood in many things concerning him.

He had either few advantages of education, or had not profited by any, for it has even been questioned whether he could read the written Scriptures. At all events they were so deeply impressed on his memory, that he did not require to have them in writing. In his latter years he became sensible that there had been many mistakes in his first views of truth and duty, and he exhorts his followers against self-righteousness, and the indulgence of gloomy feelings and contemplations. There is much useful truth for all ages in the following remarks, from one of his letters or discourses:—"The spirits of evil appear different to us, according to the different moods of mind in which they find us. If they find that we are weak-hearted and cowardly, they increase our fears by the frightful images they excite in our minds, and then the unhappy soul torments itself with these. But if they find us joyful in the Lord, occupied in the contemplation of future blessedness and the things of the Lord, reflecting that everything is in his hand, and that no evil spirit can do any harm to the Christian, they turn away in confusion from the soul which they see preserved by such good thoughts."

The Greek student can read more particulars if he pleases about Anthony, as his life has been written

at some length by Athanasius. He lived to a great age, and latterly such crowds of persons came to him in his various retreats, for spiritual direction, that he found it hardly possible to obtain the solitude which he always desired for himself. "Anthony," says Neander, "*without any conscious design of his own*, became the founder of a new mode of living in common; for it happened without any special efforts of his, that persons of similar dispositions attached themselves to him, and building their cells around his, made him their spiritual guide and governor."

Twice, when very old, at times of special emergency in the Church, he left his solitude, and visited Alexandria, where his appearance produced an extraordinary sensation, both among pagans and Christians. Indeed his great influence over others proves that he must have been a man of no ordinary mind, and doubtless he was an instrument of much good in his day to many souls. But the unscriptural and unnatural mode of living which his example induced so many to adopt, has proved a source of incalculable evil in all after ages. He died in peace, at the age of one hundred and five, retaining his faculties to the last, and directing his friends to keep the place of his burial concealed, lest it should become an object of superstitious veneration.

There is nothing more which we need especially

to notice in regard to this third century. Its close found the Church in a state of outward rest and prosperity, but with too many symptoms of declension within. And the Lord was preparing the old chastisement of suffering and persecution for his backsliding children.









I.

DAYS OF DARKNESS,

THE LAST OF THE PAGAN PERSECUTIONS.


AT the beginning of the fourth century, Dioclesian reigned as Emperor of the Roman world. He had ascended the throne in 284, and during eighteen years was very indulgent to his Christian subjects. It is said that his wife Prisca and his daughter Valeria were believers in secret; many of the officers of court, with their wives and families, openly professed the faith; and all throughout the empire large flourishing Churches arose, and Christians were allowed to hold the most honourable public offices. What a change a hundred years had made in the outward aspect of things! but within the Church, error, sin, and worldliness were extensively prevailing, and thoughtful spiritual minds must have foreseen that chastisement would be near.

Persecution began in the army. Eusebius, the Christian historian of the period, writes:—"The heavy hand of God's judgments began softly, by little

and then to take in their own manner. The persecution which was raised against us took place among the Christians who were in military service. We were not at all moved with his hand, nor took any pains to return to God."

It does not seem very clear what first occasioned the change in Dioclesian's feelings and conduct. Undoubtedly the influence of his pagan relatives and counselors, who saw their religion giving way before the new one, had long been at work, and at length they succeeded in inducing him to active measures on their side. New rules were introduced into the army, ordaining that none should be allowed to remain in its ranks who did not sacrifice to the gods. There were then many Christians in the service, both as common soldiers and officers. They resigned their commissions, and in some instances a pretext was found to accuse them of treason, and they suffered martyrdom. At last, in 303, persecution burst forth in the most violent form. A terrible edict was published in Nicomedia, at the feast of the Terminalia, forbidding all assemblies for Christian worship, ordering the churches to be demolished, and all copies of the Bible to be burned; depriving Christians of all office or dignity, and all right to benefit by the laws, and exposing them to tortures and death. One man, in a transport of indignation, tore down the edict. He was burned alive.

The Emperor had been at first reluctant to come to such violent measures, but once engaged, became furious in his pagan zeal. It is dreadful to read of the sufferings now inflicted upon the unoffending people of God throughout the whole Roman world, France only excepted, where, under a compassionate governor, Constantius Cæsar, comparative mercy was shown. In some places large fires were kindled, to burn many at once, and thus save time. In other cases new and fearful means of torture were invented, and life protracted as long as possible in torments. Eusebius, describing what he himself witnessed in Egypt, says that at last the executioners were worn out and their weapons blunted, while the sufferers endured with admirable faith and patience, employing their last breath in psalms and thanksgivings. He describes a youthful martyr standing without bonds, his hands stretched out in prayer, surrounded by wild beasts, who, more merciful than men, seemed unwilling to perform their work of blood. In Phrygia, a city, almost entirely inhabited by Christians, was surrounded by soldiers and set on fire, and the whole population—men, women, and children—perished in the flames, rather than escape on the terms offered them. It is astonishing, considering the low spiritual state of the Church just before, that such great faith and constancy was generally exhibited, though, of course, there were also many cases of apostasy.



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This terrible state of things continued in the Eastern Churches for eight years. How slowly and sadly these years must have passed over the afflicted people of Christ ! how impossible it is for us now to realize what their sufferings must have been ! In the west, from political changes of empire, the storm sooner abated. " But both in the East and the West, Satan was permitted to exert his malice in the heaviest manner, in this last of the pagan persecutions. And the divine power and wisdom in still preserving a Church on earth was never more conspicuously displayed, since the days of the apostles. At no time since the beginning of Christianity, was so laboured and systematical an effort made to extinguish the gospel of Christ. Satan had great wrath, as if he had foreseen that he should have but a short time ; and when we consider how poorly provided the Church was for this, the fiercest of all the invasions she had ever met with, we shall see cause to admire the grace of God, who yet furnished out 'a noble army of martyrs' in a time of so great evangelical declension, and more effectually than ever baffled in the end the designs of the Enemy."*

A medal was struck by Dioclesian, which still remains, bearing the inscription, "The name of Christians being extinguished." And in Spain, two monumental pillars were raised, on which were

* Milner.

written:—1. “Dioclesian Jovian Maximian Hercules Caesares Augusti, for having extended the Roman Empire in the East and the West, and for having extinguished the name of Christians, who brought the Republic to ruin.” 2. “Dioclesian Jovian Maximian Hercules Caesares Augusti, for having adopted Galerius in the East, for having everywhere abolished the superstition of Christ, for having extended the worship of the gods.” As a modern writer has elegantly observed: “We have here a monument raised by Paganism over the grave of its vanquished foe. But in this ‘the people imagined a vain thing;’ so far from being deceased, Christianity was on the eve of its final and permanent triumph, and the stone guarded a sepulchre empty as the urn which Electra washed with her tears. Neither in Spain nor elsewhere can be pointed out the burial-place of Christianity;—‘it is not, for the living have no tomb.’”

At length the God of mercy said to the destroying angel, “It is enough, stay now thine hand.” The Roman Empire, after the resignation of Dioclesian, was governed by Galerius in the east, and Constantius in the west. The former had been all along a most bitter enemy of the Christians, an instigator of the most horrible, fiend-like cruelties against them. In the year 310 he was smitten by a dreadful, incurable disease; his body, while yet alive, became corrupted, and most loathsome to himself and all who even

approached him. His guilty conscience was awakened, and in 311 he published an edict, relieving the Christians from persecution, desiring them to rebuild their churches, and requesting them to pray for his recovery! Joyful scenes were everywhere witnessed, joyful sounds of praise and thanksgiving heard, as the prisoners were released, and the exiles returned to their homes. Even the pagans themselves were moved, and began to be convinced that the religion which could thus survive all their attacks must be divine and invincible.

But Galerius soon died, in dreadful agonies, and his dominions were seized by two rivals—Licinius and Maximian. The latter had been at one time colleague with Dioclesian, and was an old and bitter enemy of Christianity, who soon attempted to revive persecution, wherever his influence extended. He did not venture to proceed to such lengths as formerly, but harassed the people of Christ with every species of suffering short of death, and took much pains to invent and circulate all manner of calumnies against them. Of this kind of trial Milner remarks, "Never were Christian minds so dispirited and clouded. Thus low did God suffer his Church to fall, to try its faith, and to purify it in the furnace. Art was more poisonous than rage, and the deceptions seemed calculated to impose (if it were possible) even on the elect."

Maximian issued a proclamation, expressing his veneration for Jupiter and the gods, as the authors of all good, and appealing to the people to testify how well all things had gone with them since the old worship had been restored; how they were now blessed with good harvests, and no longer distressed by famine, plague, and earthquake. But just as this proud boast was published, we are told that God in a remarkable manner interfered to silence the blasphemers. A terrible drought fell upon the dominions of Maximian, which was followed by famine, and then by a dreadful kind of plague. The Pagans were overwhelmed with consternation; the Christians alone seemed able for exertion, and in the true spirit of their holy faith, laboured to bury the dead, nurse the forsaken sick, and feed the famishing.

In the year 313 Licinius and Maximian prepared for a decisive battle. Licinius vowed to Jupiter that if victorious he would abolish the Christian name. He was defeated, and is said in his anger and disappointment to have slain many of the false priests and prophets who had deceived him; and then gave out edicts in favour of those whom he had so long persecuted. The hand of God fell heavily on this cruel tyrant. Like Galerius, he was struck by a dreadful disease; he became reduced to a skeleton, and pined away under an insatiable hunger. In his agony he would exclaim, "It was not I, but others

who did it!" then at other times would confess his guilt, and cry for mercy to the Saviour he had blasphemed. So he died, one of the many solemn examples we find in historic record of the dreadful end of those who have been enemies to God and his people.

And now the scene changes, and a new order of things commences, under the reign of the first Christian Emperor. Times of external triumph and prosperity were at hand for the Church. Had Constantine succeeded Dioclesian in the days of *toleration*, would the people of Christ, in their backsliding state, have been rightly prepared for being thus exalted? No: the fiery furnace of persecution was needed to separate the dross and refine the gold. And so it has ever been, and still is, in regard to all the dealings of our heavenly Father's providence. He afflicts his children, not in anger, but for their profit, to correct their faults, to bring their sins to remembrance, to prepare them for new duties and new labours. The trial of adversity is often his preparation for the trial of prosperity. "He who is wise and will observe these things," shall find abundant proofs on every side, as regards either individuals or communities, of the faithfulness and "loving-kindness of the Lord."



II.

TIMES OF PROSPERITY AND DANGER.

ALL who know even a little of the Church's past history, must be familiar with the name of Constantine, the first Roman Emperor who professed Christianity. Early in the fourth century he succeeded his father, Constantius Chlorus, who had reigned over the Western Empire. Constantius, though not a believer in Christ, despised the folly of polytheism, worshipping only one God ; and was kind and tolerant, as we have seen, to the Christians, who, even in the terrible times of persecution, had comparative rest and protection wherever his immediate influence was felt. His wife, Helena, mother of Constantine, was in her latter years very zealous in regard, at least, to all the external duties of religion. We have no certain information as to the time or manner of her conversion, and it is quite possible that she may have been long a believer in secret, and thus have exercised a favourable influence over her husband's mind.


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Young Constantine was sent from home at an early age, and educated at the courts of Dioclesian and Galerius. Here he witnessed all the horrors of persecution, which seem to have shocked rather than hardened his mind. Some impression also may have been made by what he saw of Christian faith and endurance, and he must have felt that this was a religion neither to be despised nor subdued. But in the first year of his reign he was still a pagan, though not a persecutor.

His own account of what led to the change in his views, is thus reported by Eusebius :—When about to give battle to his rival Maxentius, feeling that his fate depended on the issue, he was oppressed by anxiety. Maxentius, a thorough pagan, took much pains to observe all the heathen ceremonies customary on such occasions. Constantine recollected the one God whom his father had worshipped, and implored this great unknown Deity to reveal Himself to him, and grant him His protection. While thus praying, shortly after noon, the vision of a glittering cross appeared to him in the sky, with the inscription above it, "*By this conquer.*" The wonderful sign was beheld by his soldiers also, and all were overawed and astonished. Night came on, and during the Emperor's sleep, he dreamed that Christ stood beside him, displaying the same sign of the cross, and directing him to make this the standard of his army.

Next morning, Constantine caused a splendid banner to be prepared (called the Labarum), bearing the sacred symbol. He was victorious, and immediately after placed himself under Christian instruction. Various attempts have been made to weaken the force of this story, and refer the whole to natural causes. But, making some allowance for exaggerations, it appears quite rational and reasonable to believe that the Lord was pleased, in a remarkable manner, to impress the mind of one who was earnestly inquiring after the truth, and whose future life was so greatly to affect the destiny of the Christian Church.

The famous motto of Constantine, ever since associated with his name and history, ought to be that adopted by every earnest Christian. We must avoid, indeed, all superstitious veneration for the mere symbol; but the thing signified, the doctrine of simple trust in a crucified Redeemer for salvation, is the "one thing" which we should never be ashamed to confess ourselves, and which we should ever seek to lead others to receive. In the strength of this great truth let us go forth to battle with all our inward and outward foes. Through Him who loved us unto the death, we shall be made more than conquerors. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"



Whether or not the emperor became really a converted man in the true spiritual sense of the word, is a question not easily answered. There were, no doubt, many inconsistencies in his character, much of superstition mixed with his religion, and much of his zeal expended on mere external forms. But we must allow much for the disadvantages of his early education, and of his high worldly position. It requires no ordinary measure of divine grace to make a man, seated on the throne of unlimited power, a humble, spiritual Christian. Let us not give up hope that one who was permitted to do so much for the cause of Christ on earth was himself, through grace, "a sinner saved" at last.

Immediately after his victory over Maxentius, being now master of Rome, he openly avowed himself on the side of the gospel, and began in every way to help forward the Church. Meanwhile the Eastern Emperor Licinius, attempted to revive persecution in his own dominions. A war ensued between him and Constantine, on the issue of which the fate of Paganism or Christianity appeared to depend. Licinius, after celebrating all the usual heathen ceremonies and sacrifices in the most ostentatious manner, thus addressed his army:—"Here stand the images of our gods, whose worship we have received from our fathers. But our enemy, who has impiously abandoned the sanctuaries of his country, worships a

foreign Deity, who has come from I know not where, and dishonours his army by the disgraceful sign of his God. Placing his confidence upon this, he carries on the war, not so much with ourselves as with the gods whom he has forsaken. The issue of this war must settle the question between his God and ours."

Constantine boldly displayed on his side the banner of the cross, and proclaimed his reliance upon Christ for victory. The Lord defended his own cause; Licinius was completely defeated, and Constantine became ruler of the whole Roman Empire.

"And now," as Milner remarks, "if we look at the external appearance of Christianity, nothing can be more splendid." The Church was no longer, as in former times of rest, only tolerated among her enemies, or even protected against their suppressed hostility; but was exalted above them on every side. The emperor, full of zeal, devoted himself to rebuild the sacred edifices which had been destroyed, and to erect others of the most beautiful description; he sought in every way to honour the bishops and pastors, multiply the Scriptures, and secure the reverend observance of the Sabbath and of festival days. Without persecuting his Pagan subjects, he exhorted them to embrace Christianity, and demolished the principal idol temples, where immoral

practices and magic arts were known to be carried on along with idolatrous worship. The Empress Helena travelled from place to place, erecting churches over the spots rendered sacred by Scripture or martyr history. The fine edifice built over the supposed site of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, is especially associated with her memory.

But after what we have found in the experience of the preceding centuries, we are prepared to hear that all this outward prosperity proved by no means favourable to the spiritual life and progress of the Church. Worldly men, from mere worldly motives, assumed the Christian name, iniquity soon began again to abound, and the love of even the faithful to "wax cold." Monastic superstitions increased on one hand, and luxurious vanities on the other; outward baptism was substituted for real conversion, and the symbol of the cross for the great doctrine it signifies. Dissensions and schisms divided the Churches, and at last the chastisement of God seemed to overtake his sinful people, in the consequences of a terrible heresy. "A bold and open assault was made against the deity of the Son of God, and persecution was stirred up against Christians by those who bore the Christian name. The people of God were exercised, refined, and improved, while the Christian world at large was torn in pieces by violence, intrigue, and scandalous animosities, to the grief of all who loved the Son

of God, and walked in his ways with holy simplicity." *

This was the beginning of the great *Arian* heresy. Arius, a name so famous, or rather infamous, in ecclesiastical history, was a presbyter of the Church in Antioch; a man of superior talents and cultivated mind, with great powers of conversation and argument; of imposing appearance and grave severe morals, altogether suited to attract and influence other minds. His bishop, Alexander, soon found that he was indulging most dangerous speculations in regard to religious doctrine. I shall not give you details of these, but only say that,—as is always the case when a man, led away by pride of intellect, attempts to bring to the bar of human reason things which the child and the philosopher must alike receive from divine revelation alone,—he went on from one step in error to another, till he plainly denied the Saviour's essential divinity, and considered him as only the highest of created beings, and therefore, as a creature, capable of change, of virtue and of vice. For some time Alexander tried the effect of remonstrance and argument against the growing evil, but at length it became evidently too serious to be trifled with, and at a synod of bishops, in the year 321, Arius was deposed and excommunicated.

He was not a character to be thus overawed or put

* Milner.

to silence. He used every means to awaken public attention to himself and his doctrines, representing himself as unjustly oppressed, and insinuating his erroneous opinions in such artful ways as to bewilder and deceive the ignorant, while attracting the more intelligent. He even endeavoured to circulate them, in the form of popular songs and ballads, among the humbler classes. The heresy continued to make alarming progress. Several bishops began to support it, especially Eusebius of Nicomedia, who tried to effect a reconciliation between Arius and Alexander, and to persuade the latter that the matter in dispute was more a question as to the meaning of words than of principles. It must be confessed that the spirit of moderation and charity was too much forgotten on both sides; but the subject was deeply important, too nearly affecting all his eternal hopes to be treated lightly by any serious Christian. A second synod of bishops at Alexandria confirmed the sentence against Arius. Meanwhile the Pagans looked on and triumphed, and it is said even ridiculed in their theatres the Christian contentions and animosities.

At length the emperor himself was obliged to take up the subject. He was no theologian, and anxious for nothing so much as peace and uniformity. His chief counsellors were Eusebius of Nicomedia, and the other Eusebius the historian, whom we have repeatedly quoted, now Bishop of Cæsarea. This

latter, though not decidedly a follower of Arius, was yet unwilling to allow the great importance of the dispute, and chiefly desirous to hush it up, as relating to mysteries upon which it was unwise to speculate. Constantine wrote to both Alexander and Arius, blaming both, and exhorting them to be reconciled. He sent the letters by an eminent saint, Hosius, Bishop of Corduba, who had severely suffered in the last persecutions. Hosius found the breach far too serious to be thus made up, and the emperor next formed the resolution of calling in the aid of the whole Church, by summoning a council of bishops and presbyters from all parts of the Christian world.

The famous "Council of Nice" met in the city of that name, in the province of Bithynia, in the year 325. We are told that three hundred and eighteen bishops were present, and probably as many presbyters. Their travelling expenses and maintenance were paid by the emperor, who himself attended and took much interest in their deliberations.

It would not be useful or interesting for our present purpose to give a detailed account of the discussions. Arius defended his heresy in the most bold yet artful manner. But he was opposed by an overwhelming majority, and thus we have a most cheering and satisfactory testimony to the faith of the general Church at this period, in the precious truth of our Saviour's divinity. The venerable Hosius was

appointed to draw up a general creed or confession of faith, the same in substance as that which is now found under the name of the Nicene Creed in the English prayer-books. This received the approbation of Constantine, who declared that whoever refused to agree to it should be banished. Arius was deposed, excommunicated, and banished to Illyricum, along with a few of his most steady adherents. The greater number of his party, by the help of unworthy equivocations and mental reservations, managed to sign the creed and save themselves.

One of those who took a distinguished part in the debate at Nice, was the celebrated Athanasius, of whom we shall hear more in another chapter. He was at this time a deacon in the Church of Alexandria, and a great favourite with the bishop, who, dying not long after, nominated him as his successor.

We shall now conclude the story of Arius. The emperor's sister, Constantia, had been much gained over by the Arian party, and it was she who in return persuaded most of them to sign the Nicene Creed. She used all her influence with her brother in their favour, and on her death-bed entreated him to reconsider the case, and do more justice to those in exile. His own opinions were far from being clear or decided, and he was easily imposed on by artifice. Arius, under false professions, was allowed to return, after a few years of banishment; and the emperor

ordered Athanasius, now Bishop of Alexandria, to receive him into communion. This was solemnly and steadily refused; with what consequences to Athanasius himself we shall see afterwards. At Tyre and Jerusalem, the bishops, influenced by Eusebius of Nicomedia, were much more accommodating. Still the divisions and disturbances caused by the whole matter were such, that in 336, Constantine, then at Constantinople, ordered the great heretic to appear before him there, and give an account of his faith.

Arius obeyed, and scrupling at nothing, soon deceived the too easy and hopeful emperor. He gave Constantine a creed of his own, chiefly in Scripture language, secretly attaching his own meaning to the expressions used; he even signed the Nicene Creed, and it is said by one historian that he afterwards took an oath that he believed as he had written, meaning by this not the true creed, but another, which he had concealed about his person. Constantine, quite satisfied, commanded the Bishop of Constantinople, Alexander, to readmit Arius into Church communion on the following day.

Alexander was a faithful servant of Christ, a man of strong faith and ardent piety. In this extremity he retired to the house of God with only one attendant, and there, prostrate before the altar, implored the Lord to call him from the world, or else interpose to save his Church from desecration, by sending just

punishment upon the audacious heretic. The next day came, which was to witness the triumph of Arius and his party. They paraded the streets in open exultation, when suddenly their leader was seized with violent agony and internal disorder, fainted, and very shortly expired ! It was an awful event, long remembered with horror by all who witnessed it, and producing on both sides an extraordinary sensation. Some attempts were made by the Arians to lay the charge of poison, or even of sorcery, upon the opposite party. The latter allegation, as Neander remarks, is of importance, as showing that there was no real ground for suspecting the other. And serious Christians in general will be disposed to agree with Milner in his views of the subject.

“The reflections to be made upon this event will vary, as men believe and are disposed. That it is usual with God to hear the prayers of his Church, and to answer them remarkably on extraordinary occasions, will not be denied by those who reverence the word of God. . . . That the danger of the Church from heresy was particularly great at this time, will be equally admitted by all who believe that the Trinitarian doctrine includes in it whatever is most precious in the gospel; that here on one side an appeal was made to God in his own appointed way, in faith, prayer, patience, and sincerity, while the other side dealt in falsehood, artifice, ambition, and

worldly policy, is evident from the narrative. From these premises a man who fears God will feel it his duty to believe that God interposed to comfort his Church, and to confound its adversaries. I see no method of avoiding this conclusion."

"The evil that men do lives after them," was never more truly verified than in the case of Arius. We shall have sad proofs of this while tracing the history of his great contemporary and opponent, Athanasius.





III.

ATHANASIUS AND HIS ENEMIES.

TO trace the course of one eminent individual is often the most interesting way of learning the history of the times in which he lived, whether as to the political or religious world. We shall find this true in regard to the great Church father, Athanasius, whose chequered pilgrimage we have now to review. He lived under the reigns of six Roman Emperors, and proved himself a faithful witness for "the truth as it is in Jesus," through a series of almost apostolic labours and sufferings.

We know little of his early youth, but he must in childhood have experienced something of the terrors of Dioclesian's persecution, having been born in Alexandria, towards the close of the third century. His education for the Church was directed or superintended by the Bishop Alexander, and it is said that before receiving holy orders he retired to the desert, and spent some time with Father Anthony, whose life he afterwards wrote, and for whom he entertained

the highest admiration and respect. We first hear of him as a public character at the Council of Nice, where, as we have already noticed, he took a prominent part, and laid the foundation of his future fame. The great truth which he there so ably defended, that of the true divinity of our Redeemer, was ever afterwards more dear to him than liberty or life. And by the help of God he was enabled to give proof, in no ordinary degree, of how much a *single* champion of the faith may accomplish in its defence. What was a common saying in his day comprises at once his history and character, "All the world against Athanasius, and Athanasius against all the world."

On the death of Alexander, soon after his return from Nice, Athanasius was appointed his successor, and thus at once raised to a post of authority and influence. He was already a marked man, exposed to the hatred and hostility of the Arian party. After his steady refusal to receive Arius, at the command of Constantine, into Church communion again, all manner of calumnies were circulated against him, and he was accused both of political and moral crimes. Among other things it was alleged that he had murdered Arsenius, a dissenting bishop, and made use of his dead hand for magical purposes. A synod was called at Tyre to examine into these charges. By a remarkable interposition of Providence,

Arsenius was discovered in concealment by some friends of Athanasius, and when the dead hand was produced in court, the accused bishop asked if any of those present had known the living man. Several replying in the affirmative, Arsenius was led into the assembly, and the whole calumny triumphantly refuted. But the enemies of Athanasius persevered in their malice, new accusations were invented, and Constantine was persuaded to order his banishment to Treves, in France. Here he remained for upwards of two years, watching doubtless with deepest interest the progress of the struggle in which he was not permitted actively to engage. The death of Arius must have deeply impressed him; but he expresses himself in regard to the event with Christian moderation: "We should never triumph," he writes, "over the death of any man, even though he be our enemy, since no one can know but that before evening the same lot may be his own."

The Emperor Constantine died not long after Arius, in 337. His age was about sixty-five. He received baptism not long before his death, from his favourite bishop, Eusebius. That this should have been delayed until then appears to us extraordinary, yet the case was not singular, and proves how sadly superstition had already perverted the nature and use of this holy sacrament. Of course the Emperor's

example tended to increase the growing evil. An thus the mighty ruler of the Roman world passe alone into the presence of that God, with whom "there is no respect of persons." While we lament the imperfections of his religious character, let us not forget how great were his temptations, and humbly hope that he was found trusting in the only Saviour at last.

He was succeeded by his three sons, Constantine, Constantius, and Constans, who divided the empire. The first and eldest, ruling over France and Spain, lived but a few months. The little that we know of him is favourable, as he sent Athanasius back to his church, with every demonstration of respect, asserting that his father had intended to do the same. The exiled bishop was received by his people in Alexandria with joyful enthusiasm, and resumed with fresh vigour all his former labours.

But days of trial soon returned again. Constantius, now Emperor of the East, was an avowed Arian, and ready to use all his influence in promoting what Milner calls "the fashionable heresy." To get rid of their great opponent was, of course, a chief object with the whole heretical party. By a council held at Antioch, in 341, supported by the Emperor, and Eusebius of Nicomedia, Athanasius was deposed, and a new bishop named Gregory ordained in his place.

Athanasius fled to Rome, where the Emperor Constans proved a steady defender of himself and his cause. The friends of truth whom he had left in the dominions of Constantius, had much to suffer, and it is very sad to read the history of this period, and see how those calling themselves Christians reviled and persecuted their Christian brethren. Indeed in both parties vital religion was but little known. Doubtless the true people of God were found on the Trinitarian side, yet even they were often carried too far by party spirit and private animosities. "Prayer," writes Milner, "and holy breathings of soul, and judicious and affectionate preaching of practical religion, were now at a low ebb. Peaceable spirits were absorbed in speculation; turbulent ones in ecclesiastical contentions. The life of faith was little experienced. They treated the doctrine of the Trinity as a mere speculation, and the result of these disputes (at a Council held at Sardica) was, that each party retired as they entered upon them." Even Athanasius, though firm as a rock upon doctrinal truth, appears from his writings to have failed in meekness and charity.

In the year 349 Gregory died, and Constantius, partly persuaded, partly intimidated by his brother Constans, wrote to Athanasius, inviting his return to Alexandria. With some hesitation the bishop complied, and was most graciously received by the

Emperor at Antioch. His return to his own charge was quite a scene of triumph. Many of his enemies openly recanted their accusations, and sought his forgiveness, while his own people testified their joy by meetings for prayer and thanksgiving, by acts of charity, and according to the superstition of the age, in many instances, by devoting themselves to a monastic life.

By the death of Constans, in 350, Constantius became master of the whole Roman empire. He was soon persuaded by his Arian friends to renew the persecution against Athanasius and his party. The emperor and the bishop now stood in the attitude of opponents and rivals; on these two men were fixed the eyes of the civilized world. It was an arduous conflict, and the friends of truth had much to endure. We read of scourging, torture, and banishment being the lot of those bishops who refused to condemn Athanasius, or to accept the heretical creed proposed by the emperor. Every effort, both by flattery and threatening, was employed to gain over the venerable Hosius, but as yet in vain. That Athanasius was himself preserved alive, can only be ascribed to the special care of Him for whose sake he suffered "the loss of all things." One night, while he and his people were engaged in divine worship in the principal church, the building was surrounded by soldiers threatening to enter by force

of arms. The bishop sat unmoved amid the tumult, directing his choir to go on singing Psalm cxxxvi., while the congregation joined in the chorus, "For His mercy endureth for ever." And not till he had seen his people depart in safety, did he yield to the entreaties of the clergy and monks who surrounded him, and allow them to convey himself to a place of concealment.

After this, feeling that to remain longer in Alexandria would be only throwing away his life, he sought refuge among his early friends, the monks of the Egyptian deserts. His old friend and counsellor, Father Anthony, had, not long before this, entered into rest, after proving his deep interest in the conflict going on within the Church, by actually leaving his solitude and visiting Alexandria, where his presence is said to have produced a great sensation, and greatly strengthened the faith of the true believers. Now the numerous recluses who inhabited the mountains, and who were all steady in adherence to the Nicene Creed, gladly welcomed its great defender, and at their own peril concealed from his enemies the place of his retreat. He spent six years among them; and after the cares and turmoils of public life, we may suppose that his own soul would profit much by the interval of repose. Many of his works, which have been preserved, were written at this period.

Meanwhile a cruel persecution was carried on

throughout the Eastern Empire, and even in France, against all who refused to countenance the Arians. Considering the low state of true religion, it is not surprising that in many instances the fear of man proved greater than the fear of God. But we read with sorrowful astonishment that even the venerable Hosius, now above a hundred years old, was at length, under confinement and torture, prevailed on to sign an Arian creed, though he would never justify the condemnation of Athanasius. We are told, indeed, that when permitted to return to his own flock in Spain, he declared that the concession had only been extorted from him by violence, and with his last breath exhorted all his people to reject the heresy of Arius. Still it is most painful to find such a cloud over the latter days of one who had been so often before "faithful among the faithless," and the story may well teach us all a lesson of humility and dependence on divine grace.

In the year 361 Constantius died, and was succeeded by his cousin, Julian, too well known by his surname of *the Apostate*. In him God had prepared an instrument of chastisement for his backsliding Church. He appears to have been a man of considerable talent and energy, and of an impetuous, ardent, fearless disposition. Being nephew to the great Constantine, he was of course educated as a Christian, and for some time his profession of religion

was such that he was even employed as a public reader in the church of Nicomedia. But before the death of Constantius it was strongly suspected that Julian was an unbeliever, and on his accession to the throne he at once threw off the mask, and avowed himself on the Pagan side.

Various reasons have been given for his apostasy, such as the cruel wrongs which his own family had received from their Christian relatives, and the dissensions and sins which he saw abounding in both of the contending Church parties. "Both of these," says a modern historian, "may be true; for it is clear from some parts of his subsequent conduct, that his enmity to Christianity was founded more on passion than on reason, and his hatred of the faith is more prominent than his disbelief of it. Hence it is, that having renounced one religion, he flew with ardour to the exercise of the other, and sought its aid against the common adversary."

This was the last effort of sinking Paganism, and Satan could not have chosen a more suitable agent for his work. Julian was too wise and artful to attempt at first open persecution against his Christian subjects. On the contrary, he published edicts of toleration for other religions, while he at the same time proclaimed his own to be that of the state. He immediately rebuilt the old idol temples, restored all the heathen ceremonies and sacrifices, himself

ostentatiously observing them all ; while he laboured to *improve* the system, to correct the morals of the priesthood, discountenance vice and imposture, encourage philosophy and benevolence, and, in short, to engraft some of the fruits of the gospel on the stem of the old idolatry. Everything was done to exalt heathenism, and to degrade Christianity. Ridicule, insult, injustice of every kind, were directed against the followers of Jesus. They were henceforward to be only spoken of as *Galileans*, and the Redeemer called the Son of Mary, or the Galilean. When some ventured to complain of cruel injustice, he replied, " You know what directions of passiveness under injuries Christ has given you !"

Although, from his birth and education, Julian must have only hated or despised the Jews, and held Moses in derision afterwards as completely as St. Paul, yet he affected to patronize and encourage them in all their secular concerns, asked their prayers for his success in war, and urged them to rebuild their temple and restore its worship. In this we can see a master stroke of policy. For three hundred years the exact fulfilment of our Lord's prophecy concerning the total destruction of the temple at Jerusalem had been one of the strongest external evidences for the truth of Christianity. Could this prophecy be falsified, and the Jewish worship restored, the religion of Jesus, after all its triumphs,

would be proved to rest on no solid foundation. On this enterprise, accordingly, the apostate's heart was set. He committed the execution of his plans to an officer of rank and reputation, a Pagan, his own personal friend. Alypius set to work with energy, assisted by the authorities on the spot. But no sooner did his workmen proceed to clear away the ruins and lay bare the foundations, than they were terrified by a violent storm and earthquake, while balls of fire, bursting forth from the ground, scorched and dispersed them. This happened repeatedly. In the words of a Pagan historian: "Horrible balls of fire breaking out near the foundations with repeated attacks, rendered the place inaccessible to the scorched workmen from time to time, and the element resolutely driving them to a distance, the enterprise was dropped." "No historical fact," says Milner, "since the days of the Apostles, seems better attested, by the accounts both of Jewish, Christian, and heathen writers."

But we must return to Athanasius and his eventful history. Taking advantage of the Emperor's professed toleration, he ventured to return to Alexandria in 362, upon the death of the Arian bishop who had been illegally appointed over his people. Both parties in the Church, feeling their danger from a common enemy, seem at this time to have greatly abated their mutual animosities. Athanasius endeavoured

quietly, though diligently, to restore order, preach the true doctrines, and relieve the distressed without respect of persons. He was not, however, long left at liberty. The heathen population complained of him to the Emperor, who, forgetting his own affected moderation, ordered his banishment, and even threatened to fine the authorities severely, if he were not quickly expelled. "I am deeply afflicted," he wrote, "at the contempt of the gods, which is shown by this man; it will be highly agreeable to me if you drive the villain out of Egypt, who under my government has had the insolence to baptize Grecian women of quality."

Again the long tried soldier of Christ had to seek safety by flight. He endeavoured to reach his old shelter in the Egyptian deserts, but was closely pursued, and in the end escaped by returning to Alexandria, and remaining concealed there till the end of the persecution. This, by the mercy of God, was not far distant. The apostate Julian, after a reign of a year and eight months, fell in battle on an expedition rashly undertaken against the Persians. On finding himself mortally wounded, he is said to have exclaimed, "O Galilean, thou hast conquered!" His death changed the whole aspect of affairs over the Roman Empire, and Christianity at once resumed its sway.

Julian's successor, Jovian, reigned only seven

months, and is little noticed in civil history. Milner considers him as the first Roman Emperor who gives evidence of being under the power of true religion, and in this respect as superior even to the great Constantine. While most just and tolerant towards his Pagan subjects, he sought in every way to promote the cause of Christianity. He wrote to Athanasius in terms of much respect, "Return," he says, "to the holy Churches, feed the people of God. Let the pastor at the head of the flock offer up prayers for our person ; for we are persuaded that God will diffuse on us and on our fellow Christians his signal favours, if you afford the assistance of your prayers."

The Arians tried their old arts and calumnies in vain. Jovian, frank and upright, was not deceived or won over, and during his brief reign Athanasius and his attached people enjoyed a tranquil season of happiness. But the Emperor died suddenly, and was succeeded in the Eastern Empire by his brother Valens, whom the Arians soon gained to their party. He ordered, in the year 367, that those bishops who had been deposed in the reign of Constantius, and since restored, should be again expelled from their churches. This edict of course included and was probably chiefly aimed against Athanasius. Yet so great was the affection and veneration entertained for him in Alexandria, that for some time the chief magistrate had not courage to attempt to execute the

sentence. When at length, by night, with an armed force, he broke into the church, Athanasius, having received timely warning of danger, was not to be found. He had taken refuge in a new and strange retreat, the sepulchre of his father. Here he is said to have remained for four months. Can we imagine what his feelings must have been in this gloomy abode? Surely, weary and exhausted, he must have longed to share the rest of those who slept in Jesus around him, and been ready to exclaim with the prophet of old, "Lord, it is enough!" But we may well believe that there were also brighter hours, when the Saviour would grant such manifestations of His love and glory to His faithful servant, as would make the sepulchre seem like "the gate of heaven."

This was the last separation of Athanasius from his people. So strong was the popular feeling in his favour, that even Valens could not long oppose it. He was recalled, and spent the remaining years of life in the peaceful discharge of his episcopal duties. He died in 373, at the age of seventy-six or seventy-seven. No particulars of his death are recorded, but it must not have been unexpected, as he named his successor in office. He had been forty-six years Bishop of Alexandria, twenty of which were spent in various exiles, and a large portion of the remainder in earnest "contending for the faith," against its treacherous and bitter enemies. How gladly must

he have at length received the summons to cease from his labours and enter into his Master's joy! And how bright and encouraging is the example he has left, of what may be achieved by *one* devoted champion, in fighting the battles of the Lord.

He had never married; the strange mistake of supposing family ties undesirable for those intending to lead what was called "a religious life," was becoming more and more prevalent; and, except Cyprian, who married before his conversion, we do not read of any of the great men in the Church at this period having a wife or family. This of itself must make a blank in their characters, both as men and Christians.

The following description of Athanasius is given by an old French historian:—

"Athanasius was the greatest man of his age, and perhaps, all things considered, the Church has never owned a greater. His intellect was correct, lively, and penetrating; his heart generous and disinterested; he was courageous to *sang froid*, and his heroism was ever consistent and equal, without impetuosities or impulses; his charity boundless; his piety manly, simple, and noble as the gospel itself; his eloquence natural, acute, and practical, going straight to the point in question with a precision rare among the Greeks of that period. The austerity of his life rendered his virtue respected, while his gentleness

in social intercourse made him beloved. The calmness and serenity of his soul was painted in his countenance. Never did Greek or Roman love his country as Athanasius loved the Church, whose interests were ever inseparable from his own. . . . Julian, who did not persecute the other bishops, at least not openly, counted it would be a *coup d'état* to take *his* life, believing that the destiny of Christianity was attached to that of Athanasius."





IV.

AMBROSE OF MILAN.

IV E shall now turn from the East to the West, in order to become acquainted with another great Father of the Church,—Ambrose of Milan, who rose into eminence just about the time when Athanasius, after his long labours and sufferings, entered into rest.

His natural disposition appears to have been more gentle than that of the great eastern defender of the faith, and although equally earnest in his adherence to the truth of God, Ambrose was not called to such arduous conflicts in its defence, by Him who appoints each faithful soldier and servant to the post of duty which He sees it best for him to occupy.

Ambrose was born about the year 333, or soon after. His father held a high office in France, as Prefect, or Deputy-governor. A story is related of the child's infancy, which however may be a mere legend, that while asleep in the open air at Treves, a swarm of bees alighted on the cradle, and covered

his face. The nurse, though much alarmed, observed with astonishment that even within his lips they appeared to do the child no harm, and his father, coming up at this moment, recollected that classical legends told of the same thing having happened to the Greek philosopher Plato, as an omen of his future eloquence. He directed that the insects should not be disturbed, (certainly the wisest course at all events), and in a few minutes they flew away without having injured the sleeping infant. But the incident was not forgotten in the family, and considered as a presage that Ambrose was to be no ordinary man.

While he was yet young, his father died, and his mother removed with her family to Rome. Here the boy received every advantage that an education suited to his rank could afford. His elder sister Marcellina, according to the mistaken ideas of duty already too prevalent, had taken the vows of single life. She was truly pious, and bestowed much pains upon her young brother ; and, probably through her instrumentality, his heart was early impressed by divine truth ; but we have no particular account of his conversion.

He adopted the legal profession, and soon became distinguished in it. He attracted the notice of Probus, Prefect of Italy, who first made him a member of council, and then appointed him governor over some of the northern provinces, saying as he

gave the commission, (in what appeared prophetic words), "Go, and govern more like a bishop than a judge." Ambrose fixed his home at Milan, and there won the respect and love of all around him by his character and conduct; when, as Milner remarks, "one of those sudden turns of Providence, which are so conspicuous in the lives of many persons of eminent godliness, threw him into a course of life extremely different from his former position."

In the year 374, Auxentius, Bishop of Milan, died. He was a confirmed Arian, but had by art and misrepresentations imposed upon the Emperor Valentinian, then reigning in the West, who, though desirous to support the true faith, was not proof against the duplicity of the heretic party. On the death of Auxentius, the bishops of the provinces met at Milan to nominate a successor, Valentinian referring the whole decision to them, desiring them to "choose a man fit to instruct by life as well as doctrine." It was no easy task, for party spirit was high in the town, and the Arians were bent upon having one of themselves appointed. As there appeared to be danger of a serious tumult, Ambrose, in his capacity of governor, hastened to the church, and addressed the assembly with his usual eloquence, on the duty of peace and concord. At the close of his speech, it is said that the voice of a child was heard exclaiming, *Ambrose is bishop!* and the whole

assembly, catching at the idea, loudly re-echoed it. The opposing parties, as if by an influence from heaven, laid aside their differences, and with one consent elected Ambrose.

Overwhelmed with astonishment, he hastily left the church, and positively refused to listen to the proposal. As it was still pressed upon him, he resorted to all means, some of them very strange ones, to divert the people from their purpose, and make them believe that they had been mistaken in their good opinion of his temper and moral conduct. Finding that these artifices would not succeed, he attempted flight. He was followed and arrested, and at length, believing the commands of the emperor, and solicitations of the Church, to be indications of the will of God, his extreme reluctance was overcome, and he accepted the office of which he considered himself so unworthy.

He was now at the age of thirty-four. His first act was to receive baptism, which, following the superstitious custom of the time, he had hitherto delayed. He wished to make this an excuse for delaying his ordination, according to St. Paul's words, 1 Tim. iii. 6. But all his objections and scruples were over-ruled, and he was ordained Bishop of Milan, eight days after his baptism, the Church and the emperor alike expressing their joy and thankfulness. Nor were these feelings misplaced, nor the expecta-

tions so highly raised disappointed in their object. Ambrose, by the grace of God, proved fully equal to the duties and responsibilities so suddenly laid upon him.

He committed the care of his worldly affairs to his brother Satyrus, and devoted himself wholly to the work of the ministry. As his studies had hitherto been of a legal kind, he had much to learn in theology, and derived great benefit from the instructions of an eminent Christian holding office in the Church at Rome, named Simplician, whom he persuaded to come to Milan. He found much labour required in order to restore doctrine and discipline among his people, and it is wonderful to read of the amount of pastoral work which he accomplished, in preaching, teaching, administering the sacraments, and writing for publication. Through his exertions, says Milnet, Arianism was expelled from Italy.

In the year 375 the Emperor Valentinian died, and was succeeded by his son Gratian. This young prince appears to have been piously disposed. He wrote in affectionate terms to the bishop of Milan, inviting him to visit him at Rome, to instruct and strengthen him in the true faith, and also mentioning some doctrinal points on which he requested him to write. During the whole of this reign, Ambrose was quietly and usefully occupied in his pastoral duties.

But the saying of our Lord, "In the world ye shall have tribulation," holds true in every age, and this devoted servant of a persecuted Master was not to be excepted from trials. The young emperor whose character seemed so full of promise, in the mysterious providence of God was taken away by a violent death, during the rebellion of Maximus, who commanded in Britain, and who now threatened to usurp the throne. Many troubles followed. The emperor next in succession, Valentinian II., was a minor, and his mother Justina a decided Arian. Ambrose was sent as ambassador to Maximus, then in France, and succeeded in arranging terms of peace, and averting the threatened invasion of Italy. But the empress, regardless of this service, took advantage of outward tranquillity to use all her influence in order to establish heresy once more in Milan. Ambrose was called upon to sanction the appointment of an Arian minister over one of the churches under his charge. The emperor, it was argued, might surely have one church in Milan where he could worship according to his own conscience. Ambrose knew well how concession would be followed by further demands, and firmly refused his consent. His boldness drew down much persecution upon his friends and adherents, and his own liberty, if not life, was soon in serious danger. He endeavoured to improve this trying time for the spiritual good of his flock, and is said to have


especially encouraged them by devotional hymns, introducing the custom of singing in choirs answering each other, or what we call responsive singing. These hymns generally concluded by a solemn doxology to the Holy Trinity. All who know and have felt the power of sacred music, will readily agree that no means could have been found, more likely to soothe and cheer the drooping hearts of the faithful, during a period of suspense and trial.

The bishop's firmness prevailed, and tranquillity was restored. He improved it to the utmost for prosecuting his pastoral and literary labours, and about this time was privileged to admit into the Church by baptism the great Augustine. It is surely a high tribute to the Christian character of Ambrose, to find that on a new threatening of invasion by Maximus, his great enemy Justina implored him once more to undertake the part of ambassador and mediator at the court of the usurper. He set out accordingly on this formidable journey, and executed his difficult commission with much courage and fidelity, but without his former success. Maximus crossed the Alps, and Italy was only saved by the intervention of Theodosius, then emperor of the eastern empire. Being victorious over the usurper, who fell in battle, Theodosius established Valentinian over all the empire of the West, and also induced the young prince to renounce his mother's principles, and be reconciled.

to Ambrose. Whether or not he became truly converted, we cannot be sure; but he certainly ever after loved and valued Ambrose, and when dying, in 392, of wounds received during another rebellion, he entreated the bishop to come and baptize him. Ambrose arrived too late, which he deeply regretted, but expressed himself in writing to Theodosius, and in a funeral discourse, as having every hope of his young friend's salvation.

Theodosius now reigned over the whole Roman empire. Milner considers him "a great and wise prince, who had the true fear of God before his eyes," and who "more vigorously supported Christianity, according to his ideas of it, than any emperor before him." But a naturally passionate temper sometimes hurried him into acts of injustice and cruelty. Of this one instance, alike memorable in connection with himself and with Ambrose, is recorded. A popular tumult had arisen in the town of Thessalonica, and the emperor's officer there had been murdered. Theodosius, in violent indignation, ordered military execution upon the people. Ambrose interceded and mercy was promised, but the chief officers of court interfered; the warrant was signed, and seven thousand inhabitants of the city were massacred in a few hours, without even a form of trial. Ambrose wrote a letter of faithful reproof, and while assuring Theodosius of his sorrowful affection, and earnest

prayers for his forgiveness from God, refused to admit him to the communion, till convinced of his repentance. During eight months the emperor was excluded from public ordinances. When the festival of Christmas drew near, his grief and mental agitation could not be concealed from those around him, and Ruffus, one of his principal officers, volunteered to go to the bishop, and to persuade or compel him to yield. Ambrose, in reply to his arguments, after reproaching him with having by his rash counsels been one great cause of the massacre of Thessalonica, declared that for himself he would submit to death, rather than give up in this matter what he considered a point of sacred duty. Soon after this interview, the emperor appeared in person, and professed to be thoroughly humbled, and ready to give any proof of penitence which Ambrose might demand. A public penance was enjoined, to which he submitted, putting off his imperial robes, and praying prostrate on the pavement of the church, repeating the words of the Psalmist, "My soul cleaveth to the dust, quicken thou me according to thy word." The people wept and prayed along with him, much affected by so unusual a spectacle. Theodosius was afterwards re-admitted into all Christian privileges, and is said to have retained a softening and salutary impression from this affair during all the remainder of his life. He continued ever attached to Ambrose,



and in dying recommended his children to his care. He died in 395, after a reign of sixteen years.

Ambrose did not long survive Theodosius. In the year 397 he was called to enter the heavenly rest, at the age of fifty-seven, his life, humanly speaking having been shortened by his manifold toils and incessant mental activity. His last illness was of some length, and deputies were sent to him from distant Churches, entreating him to beseech the Lord that a life so precious as his own might be longer spared. But the Divine will was otherwise, and he was doubtless himself willing, if not desirous, to depart and be with Christ. Fleury, a French historian, graphically describes how while several deacons were standing at the end of the long apartment where Ambrose lay, conversing in low whispers of the loss they were soon to sustain, and of the person most suitable to succeed in office, the sufferer, whom they believed could not possibly hear their conversation, suddenly joined in it, and approved of their choice. Fleury goes on to relate that on Good Friday, April 3d, the dying saint passed the whole evening in silent prayer. At midnight his friend Honorius, Bishop of Vercell, having lain down exhausted in another room, seemed to hear a voice repeating several times, "Arise at once, he is just departing." He hastened to the apartment of the

dying Ambrose, administered the holy Sacrament, and received his last sigh.

Thus died this eminent servant of Christ, after twenty-two years of ministerial labour, "admired, lamented, and regretted," says Milner, "by the whole Christian world." His life is in some respects a great contrast to that of Athanasius. With the exception of some years of persecution under Justina, he was in general the friend of princes, and the object of almost universal respect and love from all around him. Yet humility shone as one of the brightest graces in his Christian character. Hear his own words of pious meditation. "How shall I hear Thee say to me, 'he has loved much, and is forgiven much.' I confess, my debts were greater than those of the penitent woman, and more was forgiven me, who was called into the ministry from the noise of the Forum, and the terror of judicial administration. Yet, if we cannot equal her, the Lord Jesus knows how to support the weak, and to bring with himself the fountain of living waters Preserve, Lord, thy own gift. I knew myself unworthy of the episcopal office, because I had given myself to this world; but, by thy grace, I am what I am, the least of all bishops; yet, because I have undertaken some labour for thy Church, preserve this fruit . . . and particularly, grant me the spirit of sympathizing with sinners, that I may not proudly chide, but mourn and weep,

that while I deplore another, I may mourn over myself."

His labours in every department of duty, were immense, and must have been often oppressive to mind and body. In this respect he has left an amazing example of what may be accomplished by one man, whose heart is in his work, and who steadily resists all temptations to indolence or trifling. His writings were considered treasures by the Church in his day, but we must confess that they tended to encourage not a few of its prevailing errors and superstitions. Especially he adopted the mistake of unduly exalting single life, and multitudes of men and women were persuaded by him to renounce family ties and family duties, in order, as they believed, to serve God in solitude, or in monastic communities, more faithfully and acceptably than in the domestic circle. We can easily see how this feeling originated, in times of severe trial and persecution, when, as the apostle says, it seemed "good for the present distress." But the rapid growth of monasticism as a system, and the terrible evils to which it soon led, can be attributed to nothing but the arts of our great Enemy, ever skilful in adopting his temptations to the varying tendencies of every age.

In regard to the interpretation of Scripture, Milner considers that Ambrose suffered loss, from too great

an admiration of the works and views of Origen. Still as to the great doctrines of salvation his testimony was decided. And we must ever bear in mind, when considering the history and works of these ancient fathers, how difficult it is to ascertain now the real *truth* respecting them, and how much allowance must be made, for the injustice done to their memory in the dark ages that followed, when all manner of fables, frauds, and interpolations were mingled with their real history, and even with their writings.

But with respect to Ambrose, "the lover of godliness will be disposed to forget his errors and superstitions, faults of the times rather than of his disposition, and will remember only the fervent, the humble, the laborious, and the charitable Bishop of Milan."





V.

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM.

THE GREAT PREACHER.

WE shall now turn from Milan to Constantinople, and passing over many characters of whose lives and labours much might be told, as Jerome, Basil, Gregory, let us consider more particularly one eminent father of the Church, John Chrysostom.

He was born in Antioch about the year 354. The surname of Chrysostom or "the golden mouth," was given him in after life on account of his rare and persuasive eloquence. His father, Secundus, was a man of wealth and rank, holding an important military situation. He died soon after the birth of John, leaving his wife, Anthusa, a widow at the age of twenty. She was one of those ornaments of her sex and her religion which, by the grace of God, have been found in every period. Resisting all the temptations of the luxurious city where her lot had been cast, she refused again to enter the married state,

and devoted herself to the duties of piety and the care of her infant son. In writing of her, Neander remarks—"Many of the holy men who illumined the Church during that age would not have acquired their high distinction, if pious mothers had not sowed in their opening minds the first seeds of that religion which influenced the whole of their subsequent lives. We allude to the influence which such women as the mother of Theodoret, Monica, the mother of Augustine, and Nonna, the mother of Gregory Nazianzen, exercised upon the religious education of their sons,—a remarkable feature in the history of the great fathers of the Church. This last observation applies to Chrysostom."

Anthusa's pious care was blessed; and though we have no particular account of the conversion of John, he appears to have felt the power of the gospel from an early age. Like Ambrose, he at first studied for the legal profession, and was soon distinguished at the school of Libanius, the great master of his day, in Antioch. Here he formed an acquaintance with heathen literature, which might have had most dangerous consequences to his soul, had it not been counteracted by constant scriptural study and instruction at home. When Libanius was afterwards asked who he considered qualified to be his own successor, he is reported to have said,—“John, if the Christians had not stolen him from us.”

His literary education being finished, John applied himself to the profession of law, pleading publicly in the forum. But he appears soon to have felt that no worldly calling could satisfy the desires of his heart and soul, which the Holy Spirit had turned towards nobler objects. At this time the aged bishop of Antioch, Meletius, perceiving his talents, bestowed much care upon him, and became an instrument to him of much spiritual good. Meletius was a man of most amiable character, who suffered much from the Arian party for his adherence to the true faith. He was greatly beloved by his people, who used to have his likeness engraved upon their seals, and painted on the walls of their chambers, while many children were called by his name.

After several years of instruction under Meletius, John received baptism, and henceforth resolved to devote himself to the service of God. His natural disposition was ardent and enthusiastic in all things, and he would now fain have retired from the world altogether into monastic life, attracted not only by his natural inclination, but by the example and influence of a friend, who had already become a monk. Against this, however, the remonstrances of his bishop and his mother for the present prevailed. He was appointed to the office of a Scripture reader, as was usual for young men preparing for the ministry; and Anthusa, we are told, carefully provided for

all his temporal wants, so as to secure for him as much as possible of mental tranquillity.

In the year 370 the Bishop Meletius was sent into exile by the Emperor Valens, on account of his faithful opposition to the Arian heresy. During his banishment a holy man named Diodorus watched over the Church in Antioch, and especially sought to exercise an influence for good over the rising youth. Chrysostom was among the number of those who owed much to his pious care.

Some time afterwards he appears to have carried out his long cherished desire of joining the monks. His pious mother was probably dead, as we hear nothing further concerning her. He spent six years among the recluses, of whom he ever afterwards spoke and wrote with warm affection and admiration. Doubtless this period of retirement was part of the training which the Lord saw to be good for his servant. But his health was injured by severe, and probably superstitious austerities, to an extent from which he never entirely recovered. In 380 he was obliged to leave the mountains, and seek medical advice at Antioch. There he was persuaded to remain and serve the Church in a way of more active usefulness. He was ordained a deacon by Meletius, and in 386 a presbyter by the succeeding bishop, Flavian.

His peculiar gifts as a popular preacher now became apparent, and were taken advantage of by

Flavian, who, frankly acknowledging his superiority, without appointing him to any special charge, claimed his assistance throughout the diocese.

“The eloquence of Chrysostom excited general admiration throughout the city, and attracted men of all classes to the church. The listeners thronged round the pulpit, eager to catch each word that he uttered. At times, when he had preached to a greater length than he had intended, and towards the end of the sermon feared to have wearied his audience, the tokens of their applause becoming louder at every moment, gave him clearly to understand that it was their wish still longer to receive his instruction; and in that age, when men were more accustomed to hear the word expounded by their preachers than to study it in manuscript, a teacher of such amazing eloquence as Chrysostom, who testified by his own holy life that the doctrines which he delivered with so much power and feeling to others had a sanctifying and blessed effect upon himself, was capable of producing effects, which, as Jerome says, were wont to reveal themselves in a zealous performance of all good works. Some of his sermons he wrote with care, some he had composed beforehand but altered according to circumstances, and others again he delivered unprepared, availing himself of any event of the moment.”*

After twelve years of devoted labour in Antioch,

* Neander.

he was called to exercise his talents in a wider sphere, the fame of his eloquence causing him to be appointed to the bishopric of Constantinople in 398. His consent to this elevation was obtained, says Milner, "by a fraudulent artifice, such as he had himself approved of in such cases." Neander observes how "peculiarly dangerous was this field for a man of his freedom of spirit, so used to chastise every form of ungodliness without respect of persons,—a man who, in his impatient indignation of wickedness and zeal for oppressed innocence, could not stop to measure his words by the rules of prudence." He saw that, from the corruption in morals and religion prevailing in his new charge, his position must be that of a reformer, and to this task he applied himself with holy zeal, but not always with holy prudence. It is not to be wondered at that along with warm friends and admirers he soon made many enemies, both among the clergy, whose faults in morals and discipline he corrected, and the rich and noble, whose vices he fearlessly reproved.

The reigning emperor in Constantinople at this time was Arcadius, a weak-minded man, entirely governed by his empress, the ambitious and covetous Eudoxia. The severe faithfulness of the great preacher soon excited her indignation, which was only kept in check by her superstitious veneration for his office. In heart she became his determined

enemy, and he had another hardly less powerful in Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, whom Milner calls "one of the worst ecclesiastical characters in history." Some monks whom Theophilus had accused of heresy fled to Constantinople, and appealed to Chrysostom for help and justice. Hoping to act as mediator in the affair, he extended to them a degree of protection for which he soon severely suffered. His enemies took advantage of the step to accuse *him* also of leaning towards heretical errors. His frank, fearless disposition, which influenced both his actions and preaching, exposed him too easily to the arts of those who "watched for his halting;" but we need not enter into details of their iniquitous proceedings. In the year 403, at a synod held by Theophilus near Constantinople, Chrysostom was condemned upon charges most groundless and absurd. He refused to acknowledge the authority of the court, and in order to secure the imperial sanction, he was then accused of high treason, on account of some severe censures he had pronounced on the empress, whom he was said, in his discourses, to have compared to Jezebel.

The people, watching the church and residence of their pastor by day and night, threatened an insurrection if he were taken from them. He refused voluntarily to acquiesce in his sentence by giving up his charge; but finding that force was about to be employed, and dreading the consequences of the

popular excitement, with a truly Christian desire to save tumult and bloodshed, he contrived to escape unseen, and resigned himself into the hands of the officers who were to convey him to exile. They had not gone far, however, when they were recalled. The shock of an earthquake had been felt at Constantinople, which the empress, terrified, considered a divine judgment, and the indignation of the people being also most strongly expressed, she wrote to the banished bishop with protestations of regret and penitence, and entreaties for his return.

He was received by his people with enthusiasm, and compelled at once to resume his office, without waiting for legal redress, which however was promised. But the calm was of short duration. Only two months after his return the wrath of Eudoxia was again awakened. A splendid silver statue had been raised to her honour in the street near the great church. It was dedicated with almost heathenish festivities, and the noisy mirth of the rabble disturbed the solemnities of divine worship. Chrysostom, with unfortunate rashness, inveighed violently against these proceedings, and is said to have begun a discourse with the words, "Once more Herodias maddens, once more she dances, and demands the head of John." This being repeated to the empress, no doubt with exaggerations, her rage knew no bounds, and exerting all her influence over Arcadius, she soon procured

the bishop's final condemnation. He exhorted his mourning people to patience and forbearance, and parted from them for ever on earth in June 404.

After a long and painful journey he reached the place of his banishment, in a cold barren region on the borders of Armenia. Here he spent three years, and the graces of his truly Christian character never shone more brightly than during this time of trial. His health, weakened by his early austerities, suffered much from the ungenial climate, but his energy of spirit was unbroken. He preached and laboured for the good of the poor people around him, and, by his letters of consolation and direction, still guided his disconsolate flock at Constantinople, supporting them under their own trials, and encouraging them to carry out some plans of missionary effort among the Persians and Goths which he had formerly contemplated. "Such a light," observes Neander, "could not be put under a bushel; it must shine wherever it might be; and Chrysostom met with the fullest sympathy, especially from the Roman Church, whose bishop, Innocent, declared strongly in his favour."

In the third year of his exile he had to encounter many hardships and dangers, owing to the unsettled state of the wild country in which he dwelt. But his enemies at the imperial court, not content with all this, and jealous of the respect and sympathy

shown towards him in other quarters, resolved to transport him to a place which should be more of a living sepulchre. An order was sent for his removal to the remote town of Pityus in Pontus, in a barbarous country on the shore of the Black Sea, and at the extreme limit of the Roman empire.

An old Greek author has given a painfully graphic account of this last journey, which reminds us of Henry Martyn's dying sufferings when urged forward through Persia by "the merciless Hassan." Chrysostom was conducted by most cruel guards, who, though not commissioned directly to murder him, knew that his death in their hands would entitle them to rewards rather than punishment. They kept as much as possible out of the towns or villages, where the holy man might have found refreshment and comfort. They hurried him on in all states of the weather, enjoying the sight of "the rain streaming down his back and breast," or the noon-day sun glowing on his uncovered "Elisha-like head." For three months this slow torture continued, till nature's power of endurance gave way, and the sufferer was permitted to escape from mortal bonds. One evening, entirely exhausted, he was allowed to rest at Comana, in an oratory consecrated to Basiliscus, a former bishop of the place, who had been a martyr under Dioclesian's persecution. Here we are told that the God of Bethel sent visions from heaven to

refresh the soul of his fainting servant. In a dream the martyr of the spot seemed to stand beside him, along with Lucien, a presbyter of Antioch, who had at the same time suffered martyrdom. "Brother," said Basiliscus, "be of good cheer, to-morrow thou shalt be with us;" and, turning to Lucien, "see that a place is now made ready for our brother John." The dreamer awoke, and doubted not that the joyful hour of release was at hand. He entreated his guards in the morning to let him remain where he was, but without remorse they urged him forwards. After proceeding a little way he became so extremely ill that they saw further progress was impossible, and returned with him to Comana. Here he calmly prepared for death, exchanging his travel-worn dress for white garments, receiving the symbols of the Redeemer's dying love, and offering up a parting prayer. His last words were those, with which he had often used to conclude his supplications, "Glory be to God for all things."

He died at the age of fifty-three, and may truly be numbered among the noble army of martyrs, whose lives have been laid down in the cause of Christ. His remains were interred beside those of Basiliscus, and even, in that remote place, a large concourse of believers attended his burial, and "made great lamentation over him." His people in Constantinople, under the name of Joannites, continued to form a separate

body till the year 438, when, in the reign of Theodosius II., they were persuaded to return to the general Church by justice being done to the memory of their lamented pastor, and his body being brought back to Constantinople and buried there with great solemnity.

His memory has been ever honoured in the Church of Christ as one of her most gifted and devoted sons. When heaven's rare gift of *eloquence* is rightly employed, how mighty is the influence its possession gives over other minds! Chrysostom in his day was entrusted with no ordinary amount of this talent, and he used it for the noblest purposes. If his natural warmth of temper and zeal against all forms of ungodliness sometimes carried him too far, he was himself the sufferer; and we only see in his case a new illustration of the Scripture truth, that the best of saints on earth are still imperfect. The faults opposite to his are far more common, and we have more need to watch and pray against them.





VI.

AUGUSTINE AND MONICA.

THE TRIAL AND TRIUMPH OF FAITH.

AND now we turn once more from the Eastern to the Western Church. Here also, at this period, sin and superstition were abounding. "Real Christianity," says Milner, "notwithstanding its nominal increase under Christian emperors, must soon have been extinct, had not God interposed by another great effusion of his Spirit. He did so in the course of the fifth century, and the Church rose again from its ruins in one part, at least, of the empire."

He who can never be at a loss for instruments to accomplish his will, was pleased at this time, as so often before and since, to give *one man* a mighty task to perform, an extensive influence to exercise over the minds of others. When we think of the great Church father who now rises before us, when we pronounce the name of Augustine, and recall the leading incidents of his wonderful "story of grace," we are almost ready to lay down the pen, under the feeling of the impossibility, in these slight sketches,

of giving any just idea of his character and work. Yet enough may be told to excite the desire of learning more, from sources better qualified to gratify it.

Augustine was born in the year 353, in the small African town of Tagaste, not far from Carthage. The rank of his parents appears to have been respectable, though not noble. His mother, Monica, is constantly mentioned, in books or sermons, as a model of the highest and purest maternal affection. Her family were Christians, and she is said to have owed much to the instructions and discipline of a pious nurse. But one fatal error, in early youth, embittered her after years. She forgot the apostolic injunction to marry "only in the Lord," and allowed her affections to be engaged by one who was not even a nominal Christian. It is difficult to account for this, unless by supposing that Patricius had many external attractions, and that Monica had not yet come under the power of real religion.

Soon and bitterly had she to bewail her fault. Before they had been many weeks united, the true character of Patricius was evident, and the young wife had to suffer from his violent temper, as well as to lament his open immoralities. His mother, who lived with them, a peevish, jealous woman, was another source of much home discomfort. Monica's trials were many, and it must have been a sad aggravation to feel that she had brought them all upon

herself by her sinful marriage. But the Lord, while he chastised his erring child, did not forsake her. These afflictions were sanctified, and she was at last enabled to exercise such a spirit of Christian usefulness and forbearance, that other wives in the little town, knowing what she had to endure, looked at her with astonishment, and wondered what could be her secret support.

Her only son was born, and became the object of her most tender solicitude and earnest prayers. In his remarkable autobiography, or "Confessions," Augustine describes himself as having been from childhood of an ardent, self-willed, ambitious disposition. His mother's joy must have been soon abated by many fears for him, both as regarded time and eternity. Yet he was early susceptible of religious impressions; and when very young, during a sudden attack of illness, believing himself dying, he entreated for Christian baptism, as a means of securing salvation. Monica at the time wished to have his request granted, but as the alarming symptoms quickly abated, and recovery became probable, the rite was delayed, in compliance with the superstitions of the period. Sin after baptism being considered doubly dangerous to the soul, this ordinance, as we have already seen, was most frequently not administered until late in life, or in the immediate prospect of death.

When first sent to school, the boy, who went with reluctance, often displeased his teachers by idleness

and inattention, and was frequently chastised. Here the effect of religious training appears. "Lord," says he, "we found that men called upon thee, and we learned from them to think of thee (according to our powers), as of some great one, who, though hidden from our senses, couldst hear and help us. And so I began to pray to thee, my aid and refuge, and broke again the fetters of my tongue to call on thee, though small, yet with no small earnestness, that I might not be beaten at school." He acknowledges and laments the sins of his school days, in words which may convey a useful lesson to the young of every age. "I sinned herein, O Lord God, the Creator and Disposer of all things in nature, I sinned in transgressing the commands of my parents and of those my masters. For what they, with whatever motive, would have me learn, I might afterward have put to good use. I sinned in writing, or reading, or studying less than was exacted of me. For I wanted not, O Lord, memory or capacity, whereof thy will gave enough for my years."

At length his spirit of ambition was roused, his talents developed, and his progress in study was so great, that his father determined to make every effort to give him a classical education, such as would fit him to become a professor of oratory. He was sent, in his fifteenth year, to study at the town of Madoura, as a preparation for going afterwards to Carthage.

Meanwhile his father died. The piety of Monica was rewarded, her persevering prayers were at last heard, and before her husband was removed from her, she had the unspeakable joy of seeing him embrace the faith of Christ. He must have lived long enough after this to evidence the reality of the change by its effects, for Augustine writes:—"Towards the very end of his earthly life did she gain him unto Thee; nor had she to complain of that in him, as a believer, which, before he was a believer, she had borne from him."

The mercy shown to her husband must have encouraged Monica to pray and hope on in regard to her son. And truly such encouragement was needed, for already, in his seventeenth year, Augustine describes himself as having become the slave of all manner of sin. Of course, before this, the youth must have suffered greatly from his father's evil example, who, provided his son made progress in learning, was little concerned as to his moral conduct. His mother's prayers and expostulations were as yet of no avail. "Thy voice in her, O Lord, I despised, and thought it to be only the voice of a woman, which made not the least impression on my mind." But when, being summoned home from Carthage by news of his father's alarming illness, he found him already dead, and Monica a widow, he relates that her pious resignation and composure ap-

peared to him so remarkable, that he resolved, in returning to his studies, to give more attention now to the holy book, from which she drew all her support and consolation.

But his was not yet a humble or childlike spirit, ready to ~~receive~~ that ~~heavenly wisdom~~ which is so often hid ~~from the wise~~ of this world. "The Scriptures," he says, "appeared to me unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Cicero. My pride was disgusted with their manner, and my penetration could not enter into their meaning. I now see the whole subject was impenetrable to the proud, and my frame of heart was such as to exclude me from it, nor could I stoop to take its yoke upon me."

In this ~~state of mind~~ he fell into the hands of a set of heretical philosophers called the Manichees. They ~~had sprung~~ up about a century before, and seem to have resembled the old Gnostics in their strange errors, and attempts to engraft a kind of Christianity upon Eastern superstitions. In regard to them Milner says:—"It would not be worth while to notice them at all were it not for their connection with the life of Augustine. . . . This they ~~had~~ in common with the Pagan philosophers, that they supposed the Supreme Being to be material, and to penetrate all nature. Their grand peculiarity was to admit of two independent principles—a good and an evil one—in order to solve the arduous question con-

cerning the origin of evil. Like all heretics, they made a great parade of seeking truth with liberal impartiality, and were thus qualified to deceive unwary spirits, who, regardless of the word of God and hearty prayer, have no idea of attaining religious knowledge by any other method than by natural reason." It seems extraordinary that those men should have obtained influence over such a mind as Augustine; but so it was, a new proof of how often they who reject the truth of God are allowed to follow vain delusions. Yet he was neither satisfied nor happy; but wandered on through the mazes of doctrinal errors and sinful pleasures, "seeking rest and finding none."

Meantime, his pious mother followed him with her tears and prayers. A remarkable dream greatly comforted her. She dreamed that she was standing on "a wooden rule" (plank, perhaps), weeping and lamenting, when an angelic-looking being came and asked the cause of her grief. When she told him that her heart was breaking for her son, he bade her take courage, for where she was he should also one day be. And then she seemed to see Augustine standing at her side. She awoke with joyful feelings, and related to him the vision. "I endeavoured," he says, "to evade the force of it, by observing that it might mean to exhort her to be what I was; but without hesitation she replied, 'it was not said, where he is thou shalt be, but where thou art he shall be.'"

At another time she went to a holy bishop, entreating him to see her son, and endeavour to convince him of his errors. He replied that it was not yet the time for this; the young man was too much elated and carried away; he must first be more humbled, and she must continue to wait and pray. "I myself," he added, "was once led astray by these Manichees, and read almost all their books, but God delivered me." "All this," writes Augustine, "satisfied not my anxious parent; with floods of tears she persevered in her request, when at last he, a little out of temper with her importunity, said 'Begone, good woman; it is not possible that a child of such tears should perish.' She has often told me since, that this answer impressed her mind like a voice from heaven."

For nine more years her faith was tried, and she saw her beloved one continue the slave of sin and Satan. He became Professor of Oratory, first in his own town, and then (like Cyprian in other days) in the city of Carthage. He says of himself at this time:—"I lived deceived and deceiving others, seducing men into various lusts, openly by what one called the liberal arts, and secretly by a false religion; in the former proud, in the latter superstitious, in all things seeking vain glory. . . . So infatuated was I with the Manichean follies, that I drew my friends into them, and with them practised the impieties of the sect." By the delusions of astrology, too, he was much led

away, and also by other temptations more openly evil. His ardent feelings, unsatisfied by the true good, sought satisfaction in objects of sinful pleasure and worldly ambition.

Yet he was also capable of attachments as deep and pure as the unrenewed heart can feel. He has left a touching record of his affection for a youth of his own age, who had been his companion in childhood. On Augustine's return home from his studies, this friendship was renewed, and became, as he says, only "too sweet," so that it seemed "as if they had only one soul in two bodies." In study, amusements, and, alas, in spiritual blindness and error, they became as one. Augustine led his friend away from the faith of Christ, which he had hitherto outwardly professed, into all the mazes of Manichean heresy. But all the while the Lord had purposes of mercy for them both. The young man was prostrated by a fever, and while in this state appears to have been awakened to concern for his soul, and received the ordinance of baptism. When he seemed recovering, Augustine began to ridicule the whole matter, expecting to find him as light-hearted and easily led as formerly. To his astonishment, the invalid now "shrunk from him as from an enemy," and told him to forbear all such language if he wished to continue his friend. "Confounded," he says, "at this unexpected behaviour, I deferred the conversation till he should be thoroughly

recovered. But he was removed from my madness, that he might be saved with Thee to my consolation. After a few days the fever returned, and he died."

The sorrow of the survivor was that of one without hope. "My heart," he writes long after, "was utterly darkened, and whatever I beheld was death. Whatever I had shared with him, had now, wanting him, become a distracting torture. Mine eyes sought him everywhere, but he was not granted them; and I hated all places, for that they had not him, nor could they now tell me, he is coming, as when he was alive and absent. . . . I bore about a shattered and bleeding soul, impatient of being borne by me; yet, where to repose it, I found not. . . . If I said, hope in God, my soul refused, for the man whom I had lost was an object preferable to the phantasm on which I was led (by the Manichean doctrines) to rest my hopes. Weeping alone was sweet to me, and supplied the absence of my friend. I fled from my country, and came to Carthage."

But this sore affliction, though it deepened the sad conviction, which a mind like his must have long felt, of the insufficiency and precariousness of all earthly good, did not lead him to God. "Time, other objects, and other friendships," he says, "gradually lessened my sorrow. But happy, O Lord, is he who loves thee, and his friend in thee, and his enemy for thy sake. For, he alone loses no friend, to whom

all are dear in him who is never lost, and who is he but our God, who fills heaven and earth! None loses thee, but he who lets thee go; and he who dismisses thee, whither does he fly but from thee *propitious* to thee *adverse*? God of power, turn us, and show thy face, and we shall be saved. For whenever the soul of man turns itself, it fixes upon sorrow, except in thee."

He was in his twenty-ninth year, when his faith in the Manichees was at length thoroughly shaken, by discovering the ignorance and mistakes, on scientific subjects, of one of their leading men who had come to Carthage. "The proofs of ignorance in science which I saw in Manicheism, connected with pretensions to infallibility, staggered my mind with respect to the whole system. Thus that same Faustus, who had been the snare of death to many, was the first who released my fetters, though contrary to his own intentions. Thy bands, my God, in the secret of thy Providence, forsook not my soul; day and night the prayers of my mother came up before thee, and thou wroughtest upon me in ways marvellous, indeed, but secret."

And now the light of life, the morning of joy, was about to dawn on this tempest-tossed and weary soul. It broke through many clouds, and long and painfully struggled upwards to the perfect day. Let us pause at this turning point of his history.



VII.

AUGUSTINE AND MONICA.

THE ANSWER TO MANY PRAYERS.

AUGUSTINE was now in his twenty-ninth year. Hearing that his profession might be more pleasantly carried on at Rome than in Carthage, he resolved to remove thither. Monica, we are not exactly told for what reason, was extremely opposed to his going. She followed him to the coast, "grievously bewailing his journey, wishing either to hold him back, or go with him." He sailed during the night, without her knowledge. "I deceived my mother," he writes, "and *such* a mother! And what did she beg of Thee, my God, at that time, but that I should be hindered from sailing? *Thou*, consulting in profound wisdom, and regarding the *hinge* of her desires, neglected the particular object of her present prayers, that Thou mightest gratify the general object of her devotions. The wind favoured us, and carried us out of sight of the shore; when in the morning she was distracted

with grief, and filled Thine ears with groans and complaints. She loved my presence with her, as is natural to mothers, though in her the affection was uncommonly strong, and she knew not the joy Thou wast preparing for her from my absence. She knew not, therefore she wept and bewailed. Yet after she had wearied herself in accusing my perfidy and cruelty, she returned to her former employment of praying for me, and went home, while I went to Rome."

In the great city he found neither rest nor happiness. He was seized soon after his arrival with dangerous illness, and suffered much agony of mind in the thought of entering eternity. "How my mother," he says, "could have borne such a stroke, I cannot conceive. Morning and evening she frequented the church, to hear Thy word and to pray, and the salvation of her son was the constant burden of her supplications. Thou heardest her, O God, and Thou recoveredst me of the fever, that at length I might also obtain a recovery of still greater importance."

Finding his situation in Rome not so comfortable as he had hoped for, he accepted the offer of a professorship of rhetoric in Milan. This was a most important step in the way of his spiritual progress. The holy Ambrose was then in the midst of his labours and usefulness. He received the young

stranger with fatherly kindness, and Augustine says, "I conceived an affection for him, not as a teacher of truth, but as a man kind to me, and I studiously attended his lectures, only with the curious desire of discovering whether fame had done justice to his eloquence or not." Gradually the preacher's earnestness prevailed; almost involuntarily the listener's mind and heart became interested, and he perceived the beauty and superiority of Divine truth, in contrast with the strange fancies and delusions of his former teachers. He began to discern, also, what falsehoods he had been led to believe in regard to some of the doctrines and views of the Christian party. "I was glad," he says, "and blushed to think how many years I had falsely accused the Church, instead of learning by careful inquiry." He wished to consult Ambrose in private, but never found opportunity for this, from the good bishop's manifold engrossments.

At this crisis of her son's mental history, Monica arrived in Milan, unable to bear longer separation from him. It is said that on her way the little vessel in which she sailed encountered a severe storm, when the sailors supposed themselves about to perish. The gentle passenger, so unused to the dangers of the deep, was alone calm and fearless, and assured the others that they should arrive in safety. She firmly believed that the Lord would not suffer her to die, till she had seen her son a Christian. When

they met, among Augustine's first words was the joyful intimation, "I am no longer a Manichee. But," he added, "I am not yet a believer in Christ. I have not yet discovered the truth, and almost despair of ever finding it." "I know," she replied, "that He who has given so much will one day give the rest. I shall see you a Christian before I die."

Monica, with a joyful heart, now accompanied her son to attend the ministry of Ambrose. Between the pious bishop and herself there soon arose a bond of mutual interest and affection. "Him she loved as an angel of God; and he," writes her son, "often broke out in his preaching, congratulating me that I had such a mother, little knowing what sort of a son she had, who doubted of all these things. I profited, however, by his preaching. Every Lord's day I heard him instructing the people, and I was more and more convinced of the falsity of the calumnies which those deceivers had invented against the divine books."

More and more fully, though by slow degrees, the light from heaven broke in upon his darkened soul. Many of his doubts were removed, he was no longer an *unbeliever*. Two friends, to whom he was much attached, joined him in the search for truth. He now sought it from the fountain-head, the Word of God itself. The way of salvation became plain to his understanding, and the Saviour, long "despised

and rejected," was seen in something of His glory and beauty, as the wisdom and the power of God. Conscience, truly awakened, loudly whispered, "Why longer delay? why not give thyself wholly to the love and service of the Lord?" And what kept him back from this decision, and from the rest and peace which will ever follow it? The answer is a solemn one. It was *the love of sin*, of sinful pleasures long indulged in, which he felt must be given up, if his heart was truly surrendered to the Saviour. He had not yet courage or faith for this. "By-and-by, shortly, let me alone a little,—these were the answers of my heart. But by-and-by had no bounds, and let me alone a little went to a great length." Let young readers take notice and take warning here. Beware in time; resist, in the strength of God, the first temptations to habits and practices which conscience as well as Scripture must tell are sinful, and which, though at first they may seem but silken or flowery chains, will soon prove fetters of iron holding fast in Satan's cruel bondage.

But at length the hour of deliverance came for Augustine, through the mercy of Him who has so often "broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder." One day an old acquaintance from Africa came to visit him. He was a soldier, a devout man, and taking up a book that lay on the table, expressed his surprise and pleasure on finding it to be

the writings of St. Paul. He went on to discourse in a pious manner, and told Augustine and his friend Alypius, who was present, much about the old monk Father Anthony, of whom, strange to say, they had never heard, and of the monastic system which he had introduced into Egypt. He added an account of the sudden conversions of two of his own companions, who had at once forsaken the world and given themselves up to God. Augustine, as he listened, became strongly agitated. When their visitor had departed, unable to control his emotion, he left the house, and sought the retirement of a garden adjoining. His affectionate friend, uneasy at his evident agitation, soon followed him. They sat together for a little time in silence, while a conflict as between life and death was going on within Augustine's soul. At last, bursting into an agony of tears, he hastily left his friend, and prostrating himself on the ground under a fig tree, implored the God of mercy to grant him deliverance. A voice fell on his ear, like that of a child chanting, "Take up and read, take up and read." It seemed to him a message from heaven to open the Scripture and read the first passage he should meet with. He rose, and, returning to the spot where Alypius was still seated, he seized the volume of St. Paul, which they had brought with them to the garden, and opened at Romans xiii. 13, 14, "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and

drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and, make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." "I read no further," he says, "nor did I need. Immediately at the close of this sentence, all my doubts vanished. I closed the book, and with a tranquil countenance gave it to Alypius. He begged to see what I had read, I showed him it, and he read still further, 'Him that is weak in the faith receive ye,' which he applied to himself. With a placid serenity and composure suitable to his character, in which he far excelled me, he joined with me in going to my mother, who now triumphed in the abundant answers given to her petitions. Thus didst thou, O Lord, turn her mourning into joy."

From that hour could Augustine say with Paul, "Old things have passed away, behold, all things are become new." The bands of sin and ambition were broken, and he walked at liberty in the way of peace. The "vintage vacation" was at hand, and as soon as it came, he resigned his professorship, glad that the delicate state of his health afforded him a good excuse for so doing, without making any premature or ostentatious declaration of his intending now to lead a religious life. He retired with Monica and his friend Alypius to a country villa belonging to another friend, and here appears to have enjoyed a blessed season

of seclusion from worldly distractions, and progress in spiritual light and knowledge. He and Alypius were both considered catechuimens, and when the holidays were over, returning to Milan, they were joyfully welcomed by the holy Ambrose, and received baptism at his hands. "Nor could I at that time," Augustine says of himself, "be satisfied with contemplating the mystery of redemption. The hymns and songs of Thy Church moved my soul intensely, Thy truth was distilled by them into my heart, the flame of piety was kindled, and my tears flowed for joy."

He then resolved to return to his native land, and set out on the journey, with Monica and one or two friends. They rested at Ostia, to prepare for the voyage.

One evening the mother and son, now more than ever dear to each other, sat alone at a window overlooking the river Tiber, and "took sweet counsel together." They spoke of the things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive." They strove to penetrate within the veil, and to imagine what the bliss of holy souls must be, set free from the infirmities of the body, and admitted into the presence and joy of their Lord. They felt, for the moment, as if almost already in heaven, and sighed as they found themselves compelled to return to earthly things again. Monica was then well, but a presentiment

appeared to come into her mind that her departure was at hand. "My son," she said, "I have no longer any delight in this life, and I know not why I remain on earth. One object alone I desired to live for, to see your conversion. God has granted my desire in full measure, what then do I here?" A few days after that memorable evening, she was taken ill of fever, which quickly assumed an alarming form. She had in other days expressed much anxiety as to the place of her burial, desiring to rest beside her husband at Tagaste, but now, addressing her son, she told him to give himself no concern on the subject, but to lay her body where it had pleased God she should die. He "could not but rejoice and give thanks" that the Lord had delivered her from this last earthly care. On the ninth day of her illness, the holy saint departed in peace, in the fifty-sixth year of her age. Her memory will never be forgotten in the Church of Christ, as a model of maternal love, as well as of Christian faith and piety. How many a mourning parent has taken new hope and courage, when they have read of Monica's unwearied prayers, unfailling trust, in regard to her long erring child, and of how richly the Lord in the end granted her desire, and more than fulfilled her highest hopes! Yes, He did so, even before she left this world, and if spirits above know anything of the earthly history of loved ones left behind, how must she have rejoiced

and wondered, in tracing the after course of her gifted son, and watching all that he was permitted to do for the Saviour he had so long rejected.

Augustine closed her eyes, while "a mighty sorrow flowed into his heart." His grief was violent, and though not the hopeless anguish we have seen him suffer under a former bereavement, yet it was only by the power of grace he could restrain it within bounds. "Woe was me in such a strife," he writes long afterwards in the review of that sad separation; "I joyed indeed in her testimony, when, in that her last sickness, mingling her endearments with my acts of duty, she called me 'dutiful,' and mentioned with great affection and love that she had never heard any rash or reproachful sound uttered by my mouth against her. But yet, O my God, who madest us, what comparison is there betwixt that honour which I paid her, and her slavery for me? Being then forsaken of so great comfort in her, my soul was wounded, and that life rent asunder, as it were, which of hers and mine together had been made but one. . . . I gave way to the tears which I before restrained, to overflow as much as they desired, reposing my heart upon them, and it found rest in them, for it was in Thine ears, and not in those of man, who might have scornfully interpreted my weeping."

After a short delay at Rome, he continued his journey to Africa, and having reached his native

town, took possession of a small estate which he inherited from his father, and there lived in retirement for the next three years. Before his conversion, his mother had urged him to marry, but now he gave up all thoughts of it, and spent his time, along with a few congenial friends, in religious exercises and studies. In this quiet retreat the Holy Spirit was teaching and training him for active usefulness. His writings at this period breathe the deepest humility, and most ardent love to Christ; and along with a strong sense of the spiritual conflict, clear and comforting views of those precious doctrines of free grace which he was afterwards called openly to uphold and defend.

We close this chapter with one extract, as a specimen of Augustine's theology:—

“My conscience,” (he is addressing a friend), “is all over satisfaction; the anguish of my past sufferings is quite swallowed up, and not so much as a troublesome remembrance of them left behind. By that most holy, that most precious blood which Christ was content to shed upon the cross for our redemption, he hath hidden my sins in his wounds, and washed my stains in his most precious blood. I armed an angry justice against myself, and it is discharged upon his head; mine is the crime and his the torture. . . . His piety suffices for my want of it; his ready service for my perverseness; his meekness for

my untractable temper; his humility for my pride; his patience for my discontent; his kindness for my hard-heartedness; his calmness of soul for my fretfulness and unruly passions. . . . Let the Lord be the grand subject of our study; let him preside over all our inclinations—be the ultimate aim of all our desires—dwell always in our thoughts—and reign supreme as the governing principle of all our actions. In a word, let us contemplate, and choose, and remember, and reverence him above all, and make it our business to live to him alone.”





VIII.

AUGUSTINE AND HIS LABOURS.

THE latter half of Augustine's life, though in itself the most important, can hardly seem so interesting to a youthful reader as the story of his early wanderings and conflicts. After spending about three years in his quiet retreat at Tagaste, an earnest invitation led him to visit the town of Hippo, a city then of some note on the African coast. Here the people soon entreated him to remain among them, and assist their excellent aged Bishop Valerius, who felt unable for all the duties that devolved upon him. He, a truly godly man, joyfully hailed the arrival of his younger brother, as an answer to many prayers, and ordained him presbyter, with license to preach in presence of the bishop, "a thing before unknown in Africa." Augustine at his ordination could not refrain from tears, under a deep sense of unworthiness. Some who were present thought he wept from regret that he had not been appointed bishop! How incapable

are common minds of understanding the feelings of a sensitive Christian soul ! He began his ministerial labours in the spring of 392, in his thirty-ninth year.

His preaching was of no common order. He watched for souls, "as one that must give account;" he addressed sinners as one who had himself proved, by personal experience, all the allurements and all the miseries found in the ways of sin, and the rest and joy to be found in Christ alone. He pleaded, he wept, and eloquence so truly from the heart of the preacher soon affected those who heard. Speaking of one most solemn and earnest remonstrance against some special form of evil, he says, "I did not make them weep, by first weeping over them ; but while I was preaching their tears prevented mine. Then I own I could not restrain myself. After we had wept together I began to entertain great hopes of their amendment." He changed the latter part of this discourse to a strain more suited for the softened feelings of the people than he had at first intended. And from that day the sinful practice alluded to was given up by them.

The venerable Valerius, perceiving what a treasure God had sent in his assistant, now exerted himself to procure his appointment as a regular colleague. This the Church joyfully agreed to, but Augustine was with difficulty prevailed on to consent. "As a son with the father," he served in the ministry along

with his aged friend, and in 395, on the death of Valerius, became sole Bishop of Hippo.

He was called, like Athanasius in former years, to stand prominently forward in the Church, as a great defender of the faith from the assaults of its enemies. Against his old seducers, the Manichees, who abounded in Africa, he laboured with much success, and was "abundantly blessed in opposing their doctrines, and in recovering souls which had been deluded by them." One day, after preaching, he asked some friends who were at table with him, whether they had not observed something singular in his discourse that morning? They replied that they had, as he had abruptly digressed from his subject, and ended by an argument against Manichean delusions. He said he had been led into this without any previous intention, and felt that probably there was some person in the audience whom the Lord designed to profit by it. A day or two after this, Augustine was visited by a merchant named Firmus, who, throwing himself at his feet in much agitation, entreated with tears for his prayers, and those of the friends present, confessing that he had long lived a zealous Manichee, and only of late, by divine mercy, through the bishop's preaching, had been convinced of his errors. It was found on inquiry, that the very sermon we have spoken of had been the means of his conversion. From that time

Firmus devoted himself to the service of God, and even became a presbyter in one of the churches.

But in order to understand the special work appointed to Augustine, we must review what is called *the Pelagian heresy*.

Pelagius, a Briton by birth, was a monk, and appears to have been a man of good moral character, and considerable reputation in the religious world. He was fond of travelling, visiting the various monasteries in many parts of Europe, and thus became generally known and much esteemed. It was late in life before his heretical notions appeared, and how he had been led into them we do not know. Early in the fifth century, Chrysostom writes to a friend, "I am much grieved for Pelagius, the monk; consider what crowns must be reserved for those who stand firm, when men who have lived in so much mortification and holiness appear to be so carried away." His leading errors were a denial of what we call the doctrine of Original Sin; maintaining that all men were born into this world in the same state as Adam before he fell; and as a natural consequence of this, denying the necessity or reality of the Holy Spirit's work in regeneration, and asserting that men were able, in their own strength, by good works to secure their salvation. Of course the doctrine of the Atonement was also done away with, and the work of Christ made only that of an *example* of perfect

righteousness. These views, though so completely opposed to Scripture and Christian experience, were suited to please the pride of the natural heart; and Pelagius insinuated them in the most artful manner, poisoning by degrees the minds of his hearers. He had a friend and companion named Celestinus, who adopted the same sentiments, and was equally zealous in their propagation.

After the invasion of Italy by the Goths in 410, many persons fled for refuge into Africa, and among others the two heretical leaders. Pelagius was in Hippo for a short time during an absence of Augustine. He then travelled over to Palestine, where his dangerous teaching soon became apparent, and was earnestly opposed by the celebrated Jerome, who lived there in monastic seclusion. In the meantime Celestinus, at Carthage, so openly discovered his errors that he quickly attracted the notice of the general Church, was summoned before a synod, and condemned as a heretic. He retired to Sicily, and was not idle there.

The evil now rapidly increased, and Augustine began vigorously to oppose it. The former great effort of Satan had been directed against the divinity of the Lord Jesus, and this one was against the work of the Holy Spirit. The great defender of the faith raised up in the first case had been Athanasius, now it was Augustine. It is easy to see how peculiarly

he was suited for his task. He had been taught to know the sinfulness of the unrenewed heart, and its readiness to follow evil rather than good, by no ordinary course of conflict, and in no ordinary degree. He had known the great change, the wonderful, spiritual transition from darkness to light, from death to life, in such a vivid and striking way as few Christians experience ; while yet the inward warfare between the flesh and the spirit continued to be deeply felt by his tender conscience and sensitive soul. *Salvation by grace*, by grace alone, through Jesus Christ, might well be *his* motto and watchword, and such it was. For twenty years his energies were employed in unwearied preaching and writing against this new heresy. In the end the two chief heretics were "reduced to a state which is, of all others, the most galling to proud minds, a state of obscurity." Without entering into details which would not be interesting, we may dismiss this subject in the words of Milner: "Thus did the all-wise God, who is 'wonderful in counsel and excellent in working,' secretly stir up a scourge for Pelagius against the time when he should make his appearance ; and his heresy was eventually one great means of introducing juster views of gospel grace than had for a long time prevailed in the Church, and of reviving Christian truth, humility, and piety. The effects of this effusion of the Spirit were solid, though never brilliant, opera-

ting during this century, and many centuries afterwards, in the production of much real godliness in the minds of many individuals, particularly of monastic persons, to whom, for ages, Augustine's writings were a great and useful light, indeed, next to the word of God, the greatest means of grace they had in times extremely unfavourable to improvement."

Augustine, though not himself adopting monastic vows, instituted a monastery, which in its day was much renowned in Africa. "About ten bishops," says Milner, "of undoubted piety, came from this seminary. These instituted other monasteries after the same pattern, and from them other churches were supplied with pastors; and the doctrines of faith, hope, and charity, by these means, and also by Augustine's writings, which were translated into the Greek tongue, were diffused and enforced with increasing vigour throughout the Christian world." And in one of these institutions, long centuries after, the light of truth dawned upon another weary, anxious soul, and the day-star of the Reformation arose. Martin Luther was an Augustine monk.

The pastoral labours of Augustine, like those of his spiritual father, Ambrose, were manifold, in preaching and other public services, visiting, and writing; to which was added, the extra burden of acting as counsellor and judge in matters of controversy, which it was the custom of the African Chris-


tians to bring before their bishop. In all ecclesiastical courts and business his opinion was looked up to with reverence. In his domestic arrangements, Christian simplicity was combined with Christian hospitality. Milner considers it "an instance of superiority to popular superstition that he always drank wine, though with great moderation." On his table he had some lines written in Latin, intimating that no one should sit there who attacked the character of an absent brother. And it is recorded that one day when some bishops, who were his intimate friends, forgot and transgressed this rule, after listening for a time in much uneasiness, he pointed to the written lines, and said that either they must be erased, or he must leave the apartment, if this kind of conversation did not cease. How well it would be for many a social circle now to remember this lesson!

With advancing years, his devoted energy in the service of his Lord suffered no abatement, but he became more and more desirous to be with Himself for ever. He to whom so much had been forgiven, truly "loved much" in return his mighty and merciful Saviour. "O happy state!" he writes; "O truly glorious kingdom! where they who have been victorious in their spiritual warfare join in concert with the blessed angels, and sing without ceasing the songs of Zion! where a never-fading crown adorns every head, and exquisite joy overflows every heart! O

when will it please God to give me leave to lay down this load and lumber of flesh, and enter into the true rest, the transporting delight, of that blissful place? When shall I make one in that holy choir, and behold the majestic presence of my Maker, with 'the spirits of just men made perfect?' When shall I see my dear Redeemer face to face?"

Dark clouds of sorrow shaded the latter years of Augustine, for it was a time of much public distress. And though in his quiet home at Hippo, far from the seats of empire, he was not called, like Ambrose or Chrysostom, to intercourse and collision with courts or princes, yet as a man, a Christian, and a patriot, he mourned deeply over the calamities which were coming upon his country and the Roman world. His greatest written work, "The City of God," was composed after the capture of Rome by the Goths, when the Pagans blasphemously attributed all the miseries of the imperial city to the bad effects of Christianity on the national character and courage. Augustine answers their objections, refutes their arguments, exposes the vanity of worldly philosophy and the folly of idolatry, and powerfully pleads the cause and describes the blessedness of Divine truth. Milner calls the work "a remarkable monument of united genius, learning, and piety." It occupied all the writer's leisure during thirteen years.

In 428, Genseric, King of the Vandals, at the head



of fifty thousand barbarians, crossed the Mediterranean from Spain, and landing on the African coast, commenced the work of desolation. The Roman general, Boniface, after a pitched battle, retreated into the town of Hippo, and prepared to defend himself within its fortifications to the last. All the horrors of a long siege followed. The bishop's tender heart was torn with anguish. He mourned for the present, he trembled for the future. The Vandals, calling themselves Arians, were bitterly opposed to the true faith. Augustine could not but foresee all the suffering and temptation which were at hand for his beloved flock, should their enemies gain the victory. He laboured with unwearied earnestness to confirm their faith and sustain their hopes; while in secret his daily prayer was, that if "the thing he greatly feared" were indeed appointed by the Lord, he might receive strength to endure, or be graciously first called away. And this last prayer was heard. In the third month of the siege he was seized with a fever, which he at once hailed as the messenger intended to call him home. He sent for the Roman general, who was an object of his deepest interest, and once more addressed the tenderest appeals to his heart and conscience, "endeavouring to draw him from the love of the world to God." The warrior wept as he parted from the dying pastor.

The last days of earthly suffering were brightened

by hopes and foretastes of glory about to be revealed. But the departing saint ever spoke of himself as an unworthy servant—a sinner saved by grace alone. The penitential psalms were written on the walls of his chamber, so that he could read them as he lay in bed. He requested to be left as much alone as possible, that he might pray without interruption. At length the long-desired summons came to cross “the river,” and “enter in through the gates into the city.” “So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.”

He died August 25, 430, in the seventy-sixth year of his age and thirty-eighth of his ministry. “A few months later,” writes a modern biographer, “Hippo surrendered to the Vandals, and its Church was scattered to the four winds. But Augustine, embalmed in his writings, lived on. The mission of the great Church-father was, to teach men to lie in the dust before God; and, though not untainted by certain prevailing superstitions of the day, he nobly fulfilled his errand. He restored to the Church the doctrine of divine grace.”

With the death of Augustine we bring to a close this brief review of “The Story of Four Centuries.” Sketches such as these might be easily multiplied, or their outlines filled up more or less fully. It would be most interesting to dwell upon the varied cha-

racters of the great men who have passed under our notice, observing the peculiar graces or faults of each, the special work given each to do, and their separate and combined influence on their own generation and on succeeding ages. But this would be beyond the limits or the purpose of the present volume.

Let us address a few closing words to our young readers. Many and varied lessons might be drawn from even the imperfect glance we have taken together over this eventful tale of four hundred years. We notice only two of them.

Have we not found in every page of this history new proofs of the Scripture doctrine, that by nature the heart of man is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked?" I speak not alone, or even chiefly, of the enemies of Christ, and those horrid cruelties of the persecutors, which appear more like the actions of demons than of men. But in the Church itself, have we not seen the perpetual tendency to fall back or wander from the way of life; to become cold, careless, and worldly; to let the simple "truth as it is in Jesus" become darkened and corrupted, by heresy at one time and superstition at another? How quickly did "wood, hay, stubble," begin to rise on the true foundation! How soon did many leave that foundation altogether, and build on the quagmire or the sand! Surely divine

patience alone could have borne with so many provocations, and divine power alone have still carried forward through them all the work of grace. Yes, the need of divine grace, to begin and continue a new life in the soul of the Church at large, and of every believer in particular, meets us in every record of the past. Do you feel this true, as you read, in regard to *yourselves*? Have *you* come to Christ for personal pardon and salvation? Are you daily seeking his Spirit's help to keep you from falling, and to **make** in your hearts all things new?

But have we not also found abundant and cheering illustrations of the marvellous restorative power, the indestructible *life*, which belongs to the doctrine of salvation through the Cross of Christ? Again and again we have seen true Christianity triumph over every danger, whether assailed by persecution without or heresy within. The blood of the martyrs has proved the seed of the Church; and the lamp of truth, however obscured and almost extinguished by error, has yet shone forth anew with fresh brightness. And this delightful fact has held true in all later ages. During the darkest periods, God has never left himself wholly without a witness; and when the time of revival and refreshing came for his weary heritage, the old truths started up with new life, and the doctrine of a crucified Saviour was again manifested to be the wisdom and the power of God. Other in-

stitutions, other religions, grow old and decay ; of Christianity alone can it be truly said—

“ To things immortal Time can do no wrong,
And that which never is to die, for ever must be young.”

Do *you* feel this living power in your own hearts? Are *you* seeking, in the morning of life, to secure those joys and hopes which will cheer all the toil of the day, and shine brighter and brighter as the evening shadows fall across your path? If you are still without this blessedness, rest not till you have sought and found it; if it is already yours, seek to “hold fast the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end.”

May these brief sketches be like the introduction into a pleasant path, where you may walk on and find for yourselves new scenes of beauty and interest; or like the first treasure out of a new mine, from which you will hereafter draw abundant riches.



